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SOMETHING ABOUT WORDS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

WORDS AND NAMES

ADJECTIVES AND OTHER WORDS

THE ROMANCE OF WORDS

THE ROMANCE OF NAMES

WORDS ANCIENT AND MODERN

MORE WORDS ANCIENT AND
MODERN

SURNAMES

AN ETYMOLOGICAL DICTIONARY OF
MODERN ENGLISH

A CONCISE ETYMOLOGICAL DICTIO-
NARY OF MODERN ENGLISH

SOMETHING ABOUT WORDS

BY ERNEST WEEKLEY

Haec, si displicui, fuerint solatia nobis
Haec fuerint nobis praemia, si placui.
(MARTIAL, ii. 91.)

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PREFACE

THIS is a very mixed bag. In 1931 I was honoured by an invitation from Christ's College, Cambridge, to deliver the first of the annual Archibald Liversidge lectures. An abridged and modified version was published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, but the lecture is here for the first time printed verbatim as Chapter I. Chapter II, very slight in texture, is a lecture given to London teachers in the spring of this year. Chapter III, on the Supplement to the Oxford Dictionary, has already appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* and is a mere nibble at that great achievement. Chapters IV and V are also from the *Atlantic Monthly*, one inspired by the Scott Centenary, the other by Mr. G. L. Apperson's admirable *English Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases*. Chapter VI, a trifling postscript to my *Words and Names* (2nd ed. 1933), is a paper read to the Philological Society, in whose *Transactions* it has already been printed. Chapters VII, VIII and IX are elaborated from a paper read some years ago to the same Society, part of which, Chapter VII, appeared later in the *Quarterly Review*. Chapter X was suggested, as therein stated, by a re-reading of Mr. Kipling's *Kim*. Those of my readers who are acquainted with Yule and Burnell's delightful

Hobson-Jobson will at once recognize the source of most of my information. I must apologize for Chapter XI, inspired by a desire to make more generally known the wonderful work that is being accomplished, under the direction of Professor Allen Mawer, by the English Place-Name Society. The results of this work are so impressive that to attempt to summarize them is a hopeless task. So I have done little more than string together the reviews of the separate volumes which I have contributed at various times to the *Observer*, the *London Mercury* and other periodicals, the result being a rather chaotic farrago.

I have to thank the authorities of the various publications mentioned above for permission to reprint matter which has already appeared in their pages.

As practically all the chapters of the book were written independently and at different times, I fear that a few needless repetitions will be found, for which I ask forgiveness in advance.

This is probably the last linguistic miscellany which I shall inflict on an indulgent public, so I should like to express my gratitude for the friendly reception for many years accorded to my modest explorations in word-lore.

ERNEST WEEKLEY.

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE,
NOTTINGHAM.

June, 1935.

CHAPTER I

THE FUTURE OF ENGLISH

THE will of the late Professor Archibald Liver-
sidge, founder of this lecture, provides that
the lecturer shall handle the subject of the English
language ' with special reference to possible improve-
ments in its spelling and grammar '. Here we have,
it seems to me, something typical of the attitude
of the scientific man towards the instrument that
he has at his command for purposes of discussion,
elucidation and communication of ascertained facts.
The scientific mind craves for scientific accuracy
and precision and envisages the ideal of the perfect
language. It is not satisfied with what Walter
Bagehot calls the ' carving-knife ' shaped by ordi-
nary people for ordinary needs. It pines for the
razor or the lancet. It is curious to note the omis-
sion of what, after all, is the essential of a perfect
language, the very substance of which language
consists, viz. its vocabulary, for no improvements
in the mode of graphic representation or in the
machinery by which words are combined into sen-
tences will avail to attain the ideal, if the actual
material of speech remains inexpressive, vague,
inadequate or ambiguous.

The problem of the perfect language has busied

philosophers and philologists from time immemorial. Its conditions can be very simply stated. They are—an alphabet consisting of symbols and diacritic signs representing every sound used in speech, no symbol representing more than one sound or variation in sound; a vocabulary supplying a name for every object, action, state, quality or relation, with a complete absence of ambiguities and also of synonyms or homonyms; a grammatical structure of absolute regularity combined with the greatest attainable simplicity. It will have occurred to you that I am merely defining Esperanto, Ido, or some other of the many patent devices which are offered to us from time to time as substitutes for traditional and natural speech. It is to be observed that, until Professor Jespersen recently entered the lists on behalf of his Novial, intended as an auxiliary and not as a substitute, these nostrums have been the product of oculists, engineers, chemists and other such linguistic small deer. Also that attempts in this direction usually show the traditional intolerance of the reformer, his contempt for all theories but his own, and his eagerness to convince the world that 'Codlin's the friend, not Short'.

To return to the terms of our particular problem, much hinges on the exact interpretation of the word 'possible'. If it is taken as applying to those modifications by which we could, theoretically, improve our language as a means of exact expression, much might be said. If, however, we are to understand by 'possible' that which it is actually in our power to effect, the whole subject is reduced

to some sort of vaguely intelligent anticipation of the date at which our traditional and accidental spelling will be replaced by a rational and scientific system. Now this one practically possible improvement of English is, as a subject of discussion and argument, long ago exhausted. It has interested alert minds from the days of the Renaissance onwards, and the reforms that have been suggested range from modest attempts at the elimination of anomalies to the crusade for an exact phonetic system. The whole problem is complicated by the multiplicity of solutions put forward. The latest of these is Professor Zachrisson's *Anglic*, a method of phonetic spelling which, in print, suggests the artless efforts of an acoustically acute but illiterate kitchen-maid. Some change is inevitable. The ideal English phonetic alphabet exists and has now been employed for many years, especially by enlightened English teachers of foreign students who make use of the works of Henry Sweet. Its adoption in schools and eventual compulsory use by all printers are but a matter of time ; but of a very long time ; for a nation that still resists, and will continue to resist, the metric system is not likely to give an enthusiastic welcome to what may be called a metric alphabet.

The triumph of the phonetic system will bring nearer the day when English, already the auxiliary language of a great part of the civilized world, will become the normal speech of the more or less uncivilized hordes for whom their own vernacular has no literary associations, no roots in history or

tradition. Still further in the future we may imagine the complete replacement of the world's languages by some artificial speech, or, which is more probable, by 'pidgin English'.

The change in spelling will hardly be as abrupt as it might be in countries privileged to possess a Soviet or a Mustafa Kemal. The approach will be Fabian, and the attainment of the ideal, as of other ideals which we associate with that word, belongs to an age which some of us feel, with some thankfulness, we shall not live to see. Long-needed reforms, which we must acknowledge to be logical and inevitable, are usually unpleasant. They are forced by the few and eager on an inert or reluctant majority, and this particular reform is perhaps delayed by the intemperate zeal of its advocates, who seem to claim that all our problems, from unemployment to over-fruitful multiplying, could at once be solved by the adoption of a simplified alphabet. For most of us the traditional spelling has strong unconscious associations. To take a simple example, we know that the *h* of *ghost* is due to Caxton's having learnt his art in Flanders, where the corresponding word is spelt *gheest*, but, to me personally, it has always seemed that this intrusive letter makes a ghost all the more 'ghostly'.

So it is certain that a large and influential section of educated opinion will remain opposed to any arbitrary interference with our language. There will always be a suspicion that commercial advantage is being aimed at and that the business man wants English to be simplified so that his foreign

dealings may be simplified. For instance, Mr. H. W. Fowler¹ regards the attempt to make English the lingua franca of mankind as a degradation of our language. Simplified spelling will, he says, cut us off from the most precious part of our inheritance—‘And to what end? To grease the wheels of commerce.’

Before leaving the question of reformed spelling I would point out that two tremendous difficulties have first to be overcome, viz. our abnormal wealth of homonyms and our uncertain pronunciation. Owing to our extensive borrowings from foreign languages, our telescopic methods of pronunciation and our gradual dropping of unaccented prefixes and weak endings, English finds itself in possession of a phenomenal number of unrelated words identical in form and sound. There is, so far as I know, no parallel in other European languages to the thirteen *bays* or the fifteen *racks* recorded, defined and exemplified by the Oxford Dictionary. Some of these, it is true, are obsolete or archaic, but any of them may confront us in the literature of the present or the past. Not only will homonyms remain identical when spelt phonetically, but their serried ranks will be swelled by reinforcements from our numerous homophones. The past tense of *may* will become identical with the widow's contribution and the inhabitant of a ripe cheese, a youthful male with a floating sea-mark, a ditch round a fortress with a speck of dust in the eye, and

¹ This great friend of the English language died three years after the delivery of my lecture.

a translucent gem with a decoction of beer and bitter herbs, not to mention various less familiar *purls*.

A stock argument put forward by the opponents of simplified spelling is that any phonetic alphabet would, in course of time, require gradual modification to correspond with gradual changes in pronunciation. Johnson, in his Preface, comments on the impossibility of making orthography follow speech by 'imitating those changes which again will be changed while imitation is employed in observing them'. The counter argument is that such an alphabet would stabilize pronunciation and that the laws of sound change would cease to operate. There is no doubt that a great move towards the standardization and stabilization of spoken English is being brought about by the British Broadcasting Corporation. In its official periodical, the Listener, for August 26, 1931, Sir Robert Donald writes, 'While philologists and lexicographers never agreed, the B.B.C. is in the fortunate position of a dictator. In a few years the standard of pronunciation set by the B.B.C. will be accepted in all English-speaking countries.' This is an awful thought. Quite recently some of us have heard, via the B.B.C., a Scottish Prime Minister¹ discussing the state of the 'wuruld' and a Yorkshire Chancellor of the Exchequer² emphasizing the importance of balancing the 'boodget'. Is it possible that 'in a few years' these refreshing dialect characteristics will disappear?

¹ Mr. Ramsay MacDonald.

² Mr. Philip (now Lord) Snowden.

There is the still larger problem of America. As is well known, the serious New York stage regards 'received English', whatever that may be, as its ideal, but to talk 'received English' in intercourse with the average American might invite sarcasm. How will it be possible to impose English pronunciation on America or vice-versa? Theoretically a compromise could be effected, e.g. if the American would consent to order *half* a pint instead of *haff* a pint, the Englishman might consent to make *tomato* rime with *potato*; but such arrangements do not find a place in the history of language. As Dr. Johnson observes, in considering the apparent irregularities of English pronunciation, 'To change all would be too much, and to change one is nothing.' The older English pronunciation of *u*, as in *dook* and *dooty*, is, according to Larsen and Walker (Pronunciation, a Practical Guide to American Standards, Oxford, 1930), actually gaining ground in America. This pronunciation, though condemned by John Walker's Critical Pronouncing Dictionary as early as 1791, was still in aristocratic use in 1850. Walker's comment on *duke* reads oddly—'There is a slight deviation often heard in the pronunciation of this word, as if written *Dook*; but this borders on vulgarity; the true sound of the *u* must be carefully preserved, as if written *Dewk*. There is another impropriety in pronouncing this word, as if written *Jook*: this is not so vulgar as the former.' Again, will Americans tolerate the English pronunciation of polysyllables, which, according to Dr. Greig (Breaking Priscian's

Head, or English as she will be spoke and wrote), are 'accented on the first syllable and then shuffled off as though what remained of the word didn't matter a damn', or will they brace themselves with memories of Lexington and Bunker's Hill and continue to say *nécessáry* and *térritóry*? All this also applies to Canadian English, which is being more and more assimilated to that of the United States. If Canada forsakes the characteristic flat *a*, which it shares with the States and with the northern English dialects, there will no longer be any point in the Canadian's subtle gibe at the British tenderfoot, when he says that 'though a *rānch* may not pay, a *rănch* does'. It would seem also impossible to fix intonation by a phonetic spelling or even by the example of the B.B.C. This is a feature which, far more than the pronunciation of individual words, divides races and classes, nor is it easy to see how a compromise can be effected 'in a few years' between the tone of voice which prevails say at Oxford and that which is associated with the Middle West of North America.

This is all very frivolous, but it is necessary to point out the immense difficulties which stand in the way of phonetic spelling, a reform only to be accomplished by the unification of actual speech. That much has, to my mind most regrettably, been accomplished in the second task is undeniable, and it may be regarded as certain that the prevailing tendency, which confirms Dr. Johnson's preference for the 'regular and solemn' rather than the 'cur-sory and colloquial', will continue. 'The most

elegant speakers', says the Doctor, 'deviate the least from the written word.' So think also the B.B.C. and the schoolmaster, the two most potent factors for linguistic good or evil. The natural and historically justified pronunciation of English may linger for a time among the aristocracy and peasantry, but is already making way for an artificial and machine-made product which is not yet a century old. It is even possible that the 'boat-swain' of the 21st century will refer to the anterior part of a ship as the 'fore-castle'.

A special feature of our so diversified pronunciation is the great uncertainty, even of many educated people, as to how the vowels or consonants of certain words, in fact quite a large number, should be sounded. This difficulty does not, to my knowledge, exist in other European languages. We are all, I suppose, conscious now and then of a cowardly shrinking from the vocal use of words which we write down without a qualm. Personally, I should always hesitate to use in public the Arab name for an Arab chief, and, though I periodically consult the authorities, I never can remember with confidence what Eugene Aram really wore upon his wrist ('And Eugene Aram walked between, with gyves upon his wrist'). Nor do I feel happy as to the accentuation of the word that denotes a place for chemical experiment and research. Mr. Fowler (Modern English Usage) gives five possible pronunciations of *contumely*, with the comment that Shakespeare's accentuation—'The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely' (Hamlet, iii. 1)—

is very unpopular except with ' professors and the like '. In 1929 the B.B.C. commissioned six men of light and leading to settle the pronunciation of a number of the words in question. They arrived, no doubt after much bickering, at certain conclusions. These conclusions were submitted to five more men of light and leading nominated by the Society for Pure English. The B.B.C. fiats were approved in some cases, disapproved in others, and there was a considerable proportion of minority reports. Divergence of opinion was mostly concerned with stress, though the quality of certain vowels also led to disagreement. The B.B.C. must prevail in the long run, for it has the ear of the mob. Personally, I shall, during what remains of my life, always say *décadent*, but my still small voice will be lost in the thunderous *decâdent* of a democracy obedient to the wireless injunction.

Those who believe in the manifest destiny of the English language to become, if not the eventual supplanter of all other languages, at any rate the lingua franca of the world, point out that, when once our spelling is reformed, the richness of our vocabulary and simplicity of our grammar give us claims that no other language can put forward. It is, however, arguable that great richness is rather a drawback in a language which claims to be the most suitable for world dominion. The shades of meaning in our unparalleled wealth of approximate synonyms are mysterious to the foreigner and often a matter of dispute among natives. Many are the pitfalls of what Mr. Wells

calls 'our beautiful, but abundant and perplexing language'. Our lack of precision in sense was often a trial to Joseph Conrad, though he wrote English as no other foreigner has ever written it.

As for grammar, I suppose that the essentially practical and thoroughly illogical temper of the English mind is reflected in our gradual rejection of forms and inflexions to which other languages still cling. But this very simplicity has its snares. Our grammar is so tenuous that we are ceasing to be aware of its existence. It is hardly possible to read through a book printed in English, whether the author be a great name in science or literature or merely a journeyman producer of thrillers, without coming across sentences that shock a student of languages and would be impossible from the pen of an educated Frenchman or German. The great mass of the people is consciously uncertain. The columns of what may be called our middle-brow press are full of discussions as to whether this or that construction is grammatically correct, and week by week booklets appear which claim to teach the young author, not how to write, but how not to write. In a language of exact grammatical structure all such cautions should be superfluous.

So, in considering possible improvements in English grammar, the first possible improvement that occurs to one is a movement in the direction of making English grammar a subject of general instruction, which apparently it is not at present. The trouble is of comparatively recent origin. A

century ago practically all who wrote were people who had received something of a classical education. They were, in fact, products of the 'grammar school'. This steadying influence no longer exists, and there is a real danger that average English, both spoken and written, may gradually degenerate till it falls to the level of the idiom used by Mr. Babbitt and his friends, a tongue which, from the grammatical point of view, may be described as English in an advanced state of decomposition. It is difficult to control the spoken language, but it should be in the power of an educated minority to brake to some extent the grammatical decay of English. Draconic legislation against the printing of ungrammatical matter is hardly possible in face of the opposition of the whole publishing trade, which would thereby be threatened with immediate bankruptcy.

It must be acknowledged that what grammar we still possess is, like everything connected with us, largely illogical, and that this residuum is very exasperating to foreigners. One may instance the *shall* and *will* complex, stigmatized by Dr. Greig as 'wire-drawn academic flapdoodle'. Or our three relative pronouns, two of which are superfluous. Or our anomalous verbs such as *dare* and *need*. Why should we say 'he needs help' but 'he need not worry'? Why should we make *use* into two separate verbs, as far as their pronunciation is concerned, e.g. 'Since then I have used no other', but 'He used to play the fiddle'? Are our complicated progressive tenses, such as 'He would still

have been working', really necessary? Other languages are not inconvenienced by the absence of corresponding forms, nor are they found in Biblical and Shakespearean English. The elimination of these and other anomalies could, if such elimination is really desirable, be accomplished by a convention between the editors of our chief newspapers and the all-powerful B.B.C. Many students of English have advocated the creation of a new neutral pronoun and possessive which would save us from such complications as 'Each of us would be ready to give up part of his or her personal comfort, if he or she were convinced that his or her fellow-citizens as a whole would benefit by his or her sacrifice'. Here I would recommend a bold reversion to the state of mind, still general on the Continent, which regarded the masculine as 'worthier' than the feminine. Another complication which has gradually dominated English is the quite unnecessary use of the auxiliary *do*, in the interrogative and negative constructions of all but a few verbs. It would be quite as logical to say 'Know you Smith?' as it is to say 'Are you ill?' or 'I know not Smith' as 'I have not time'. It would simply be reverting to the practice of the Bible translators.

Such changes could hardly be brought about arbitrarily, except as the result of a determined and continuous effort by the broadcasting authorities, but that such changes may come about gradually and unconsciously is shown by the quite recent revival of the subjunctive mood, which, except in a few stereotyped and optative expressions, had

practically disappeared from English. It is not, it is true, always used in conformity with the history of language, but is instinctively adopted to distinguish the hypothetical from the actual or as a substitute for the rather clumsy *shoulds* and *mights* of ordinary English. In The Times Literary Supplement for September 8, 1931, we read 'Mr. Sisson took it upon himself to cable the State Department suggesting that Mr. Francis be recalled'. At a recent inquest, counsel, after an altercation with a police inspector, concluded, 'Unless you be silent, I must ask that you be removed.' This revival began in America. In reading the letters of Walter Hines Page I was struck by its recurrence on almost every page. Here is an example—'I am going down to Garden City till the President send for me ; or, if he do not send for me, I'm going to his house and sit on his front steps till he come out.' It will have been noticed that, in the example quoted from The Times Literary Supplement, the sequence of tenses is violated. This is the regular American construction, partly due, I imagine, to German influence. Our own authors are not yet quite happy with this construction. A contributor to the Daily Telegraph writes, 'I wrote to the headmaster suggesting that he asked men who had turned out failures to address his pupils,' and Mr. Walpole, in The Times Literary Supplement, mixes two constructions in 'May we plead with the publisher that he follows Messrs. Heinemann's splendid example?'. That the revived subjunctive will shortly be current English is obvious to

all who read their morning paper with an eye for language. For instance, as I write this, the Daily Telegraph at my elbow informs me that 'at Santander, the local union has demanded that the Catholic organization be dissolved, but the Governor insists that the two unions be permitted to enjoy equal rights'. Another paper, discussing the title of Spain's new Republic, has the sentence 'Alarm was expressed lest foreign nations misinterpret the title', a reversion to the Biblical English 'Not on the feast-day; lest there be an uproar among the people'. It is curious that we should be reverting to this archaic mood just at the time that French is slackening the rigidity of its subjunctive rules.

Altogether, the American influence, chiefly exerted via the talkies, is becoming more and more intense. The peaceful penetration that has been going on, almost unobserved, for a century now threatens to become a conquering invasion. Syntactical constructions of incredible ugliness and quite remote from any historical justification are becoming part of colloquial English and thence percolating steadily into the popular press. In fact, the fear has recently been expressed by an eminent divine that 'The English language is in danger of being destroyed altogether'. It may be possible that English grammar, so continuously simplified in the past, may be still further simplified to its advantage, but few of us look forward with eagerness to the day when such a sentence as 'Them guys ain't got no pep' will cease to strike the ear as incorrect.

It need hardly be said that simplification is also

possible in our elementary accidence. If we really aim at enticing the whole world to speak English, it is obvious that we must do away with *oxen* and *children*, *feet* and *teeth*, *mice* and *geese*. The process by which the three forms of strong verbs are popularly reduced to two, as in 'He's been took ill', or 'I seen him doing it', will be accelerated and, in fact, the strong verbs must disappear. This may seem fantastic and uncouth, but we know that a similar evolution went on steadily during the Middle English and early Tudor periods and was only checked abruptly by the diffusion of printed books and the consequent establishment of some vague standard of correctness. Finally, there is one feature of English, partly grammatical, partly a question of vocabulary, which makes it particularly unfit to serve as a world language. I mean its favourite device of combining a verb with an adverb so as to form what is to all intents and purposes a compound verb. This feature is really one of many which combine to make English the most expressive and flexible of European languages, but to the foreigner it is an almost insurmountable barrier. The Oxford Dictionary records and illustrates more than sixty meanings of the combination 'to set up'! I confess that I see no possibility of eliminating this difficulty except by legislation forbidding the use of this and similar constructions. Naturally our favourite construction of 'preposition at end' must go the same way and no future Thomas Hardy will be allowed to write of Wessex as a region 'which people can go to, take a house in,

and write letters from ' (Preface to *Far from the Madding Crowd*).

While changes in the spelling, pronunciation and grammar of a language are brought about slowly, but, till recent times, continuously, by a kind of communal instinct, changes of vocabulary take place with much greater rapidity, often spasmodically, and occasionally as the result of individual effort. As far back as we can study the history of languages, we find the greater minds dissatisfied with the instrument at their command. The word has always lagged behind the idea. At periods of great activity, whether literary, scientific, practical or theological, vocabularies become enriched to an extent which sometimes threatens to throw their machinery out of gear. The enrichment takes the form of new creation, direct borrowing from other languages or the elaboration of existing material. Until the question of phonetic spelling became one of practical concern, it was this side of language which chiefly interested linguistic theorists. The tendencies have always been very divergent, according as the inadequacy of speech to represent thought, or perhaps rather the inability of man to make proper use of the instrument, has presented itself to divergent types of mind. On one side we have the man of science, and with him, as a rule, the philosopher, demanding an instrument of exact and unambiguous expression. On the other the poet, hampered by the commonplace associations of the words from which he has to weave his fantasies. Anatole France praises Maupassant's prose for

possessing the three great qualities of the French writer,—‘ d’abord la clarté, puis encore la clarté et enfin la clarté’. Baudelaire, on the other hand, finds as the chief element in great poetry, ‘ l’obscurité indispensable’.

Then we have the fight between the patriotic point of view, hostile to all that is new and foreign, and the contrasted eagerness to enrich language by wholesale importation and new creation. This conflict is best illustrated in Germany, with its succession of ‘ purifying ’ societies, whose views are often expressed with comic violence. Or again, the antiquarian enthusiast, striving, since Spenser’s time, to save the obsolescent and revive the archaic, and the modernist who regards the lexicographer as one whose duty it is, in Johnson’s words, to clear away rubbish, or, as Howell says of the French Academy, ‘ to refine the language of all pedantic and old words’. Finally, we have the practical man, who, for practical purposes, would thin out our vocabulary till only ‘ basic English ’ is left, with its 600 to 700 words, and the word-lover who rejoices in the tropical luxuriance of our vast realm of words. But each and all feel the inadequacy of words or their own inadequacy in linking the word with the thought.

Everybody who puts pen to paper knows the irritating labour of composition, the feeling of disappointment and exasperation when it is realized how imperfectly the paragraph represents what was in the writer’s mind. As Mr. Christopher Morley has lately put it, ‘ I honour words and they come

with difficulty.' Some happy few, such as Mr. Bernard Shaw, seem to have the gift of perfect and unforced expression. Others, despairing, as bad workmen will, of the tools they have to use, take refuge in an impressionism contemptuous of conventional speech. Among such are, I gather, Miss Gertrude Stein and Mr. James Joyce, whose works I am so far not privileged to have studied. This attitude is well expressed in an unmetrical poem recently published in a new periodical called the Island :

The brunt of your words must push
beyond the borderline of the word-made world ;
There, beyond the range of grammar, join
up the links of events with dramatic sequences.

Let the merchants of words sell their coffin-phrases.
In spite of the darkness, living contemporary
consciousness will hoot with Apollonian clarity.

(Josef Bard.)

This writer seems to offer, in somewhat apocalyptic style, his own solution of the writer's harassing problem, which a poet, not one of the greatest, has expressed more modestly in the words—

Our whitest pearl we never find,
Our ripest fruit we never reach ;
The flowering moments of the mind
Lose half their petals in our speech.

(Oliver Wendell Holmes.)

At various periods of great intellectual activity deliberate and successful attempts have been made to supply languages with needed words. But for Cicero's Latin renderings of Greek abstractions we should not now possess the words *moral* and *quality*.

Our attitude towards the purveyor of neologisms is quite simple. He should be left alone. If his article answers to a real want, it will sell. Sir Thomas Browne's *antediluvian* was a useful contribution to speech. Whewell was as well advised in suggesting the introduction of the word *scientist* as Huxley was with *agnostic*. In another realm of ideas Mr. Arthur Roberts¹ gave us *spoof*. This expresses in a monosyllable what would otherwise require an explanatory phrase, just as *moron*,² for a person of arrested mental development, the coinage of Dr. H. C. Goddard, of Columbus, Ohio, seems now to describe quite naturally the majority of our fellow-men. On the other hand, reactionary attempts to purify the language by the restoration of archaic native words seem doomed to failure, unless there is really a gap to be filled. Enthusiastic Anglo-Saxonists may write obstinately about *starcraft* or *leech*, instead of *astronomy* and *doctor*, but the language feels that it is already adequately supplied. We may regret that young people are no longer *betrothed*, *plighted* or *affianced*, and that these beautiful words are replaced by *engaged*, with its automatic suggestion of a public lavatory. A recent American modernized version of the Bible even replaces 'Joseph . . . was minded to put her away' by 'Joseph . . . thought of breaking off the engagement'. When, however, at a period of great interest in popular antiquities, W. J. Thoms, the founder of *Notes and Queries*, proposed *folk-*

¹ This famous comedian was then alive.

² See p. 63, n. 1.

love as a comprehensive term for all such activities, he gave us a needed word and one that has become European. Quite unnecessary is the modern *foreword* for preface, coined, according to the late Professor Phillimore, 'by some Germanizing fool who found other fools to imitate him'. I am afraid this Germanizing fool was my old friend Dr. Furnivall.

The entry of new words into language is curiously accidental. *Demarcation* dates from the Papal bull of 1493 which divided the New World between the Spaniards and the Portuguese; *propaganda*, with its family of derivatives, from the Congregatio de propaganda fide, set up in 1622 by Gregory XV. It is doubtful whether the indispensable *optimism* would have become European if Voltaire had not written *Candide*. *Mascot* dates from Audran's operetta *La Mascotte*, produced in 1880, and, if my memory serves, soon brought to London. *Robot*, a Bohemian word for slave, now essential to our vocabulary, began to appear in the papers soon after Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.* (*Rossum's Universal Robots*) was performed in London in 1923. Both *mascot* and *robot* have lived because they have filled empty places, like the newly discovered chemical elements of which we hear now and then; the same might be said of the war-word *camouflage*. Then we have the native *diddle*, a back-formation from Jeremy Diddler, a character in a forgotten farce (Kenney's *Raising the Wind*, 1803) and *Mrs. Grundy*, from a play¹ that not one person in a

¹ *Speed the Plough* (1798), by Thomas Morton, father of the author of *Box and Cox*.

thousand has ever heard of and not one in a million has read. A curious example of an insignificant origin is *sheikh*, now current American for a lady-killer and not unknown in England in the same sense. It comes from a contemporary novel which, I am credibly informed, has no great literary merit. Neologisms of purely scientific origin do not concern us here. They are not so much words as algebraical expressions. The enrichment of language by misprints, mistranslations and misunderstandings is a curious chapter of word-history, but its consideration would take me too far from our subject.

Just as the poet instinctively plays variations on the notes of a conventional instrument and builds ever-new combinations, so also the man in the street seeks instinctively for words which will cover all the aspects of a concept vaguely present in his brain. It would need a whole sentence to express the ideas contained in *stunt* and *wangle*, words which have some vague kind of pre-history, or *ramp*, of which we have heard so much lately, or *dud* (the English equivalent of the American *dub*) and *blurb*,¹ which seems to have sprung all armed from the head of some anonymous benefactor of language, but which have at once become indispensable. Their excellence is really reflected in the resistance they offer to concise and exact definition. Then we have the new connotations which mass instinct gives to existing words. We may dislike the vogue of the Gallicism *gesture* and

¹ See p. 66, n. 1.

of *slogan*,¹ a Gaelic word which has crossed to the United States and recrossed the Atlantic with a transformed sense; but we must admit that they have acquired a useful significant content which corresponds to a modern attitude of mind. There is even something to be said for the rather distressing word *meticulous*. The same applies to direct borrowing of foreign words. It would, I suppose, be possible to describe Professor Hotson² as having a 'keen nose' for documentary evidence, but the French *flair* expresses the idea more simply, while at the same time suggesting qualities other than the purely nasal.

The late Henry Bradley was of opinion that many words of untraceable history had come into existence by the instinct for phonetic fitness. In discussing, in the Oxford Dictionary, the mysterious word *struggle*, he concludes 'possibly the word may be due to phonetic symbolism'. How else can we explain *blurb*³ except by saying that our instinct accepts it as exactly right? The same craving for expression which leads the great poet to enrich the vocabulary is felt by Mr. Polly. When this typical Wellsian hero describes his bicycling excursions as 'explorations meanderings', he is, within his limits, 'Joycean', and the same may be said of the imaginative showman who invented the word *phan-*

¹ For the history of this word see my *More Words Ancient and Modern*, p. 145.

² He had recently discovered and published the real story of Christopher Marlowe's death.

³ See p. 66, n. 1.

tasmagoria.¹ The survival, even among the most uneducated, of such a purely Greek word as *paraphernalia* seems to be due to a similar instinct. This natural tendency to add body and content to words is possibly pre-historic and may account for much that seems unaccountable. It is thus that the Middle English *contekous*, in the sense of quarrelsome, has gradually evolved into the admirable word *cantankerous*, and a crude example of this persisting instinct is offered by the contemporary *abso-bloody-lutely*.

What will be, in the future, the attitude of standardized English to such importations and neologisms? And how, also, will it deal with the stream of new metaphor which enters the language with each new step in material progress? People are now apt to 'fade out' instead of departing, and it is becoming a commonplace for the literary critic to describe a biography as a 'close-up'. An irate millionaire in one of Mr. Wodehouse's stories, who treads on a golf-ball left lying in an entrance-hall, is described as making a 'forced landing' against the dining-room door. Twenty years ago no civilian ever 'parked' anything. Now even chewing-gum can be temporarily 'parked' by the provident. New scientific devices of which we now have no idea must add continually their figurative elements to our stock of metaphors and thus militate against linguistic stability. What will the judges of lan-

¹ The Oxford Dictionary seems to regard this made-up word (1802) as of English manufacture, but it was apparently adapted from the rather earlier Fr. *fantasmagorie*.

guage do about it? Experience has already shown, in another region of human life, the futility of prohibition.

All this matter of our ever-increasing vocabulary may seem beside the mark, but in reality it is germane to the question of grammar. The great influence now being exercised on the English vocabulary is that of America, and a wholesale importation of vocabulary can hardly take place unaccompanied by some influence on construction. In fact, the American invasion is distinguished from earlier raids in that it concerns idiom as well as vocabulary. I have already noted the striking example of the revived subjunctive. There is also the influence of the cinema with its illiterate captions and dialogue, from which the great mass of democracy now draws the more expressive part of its speech. Personally, I must confess to a weakness for terse Americanisms in moderation, say in about the proportion which gives so subtle a flavour to my favourite author, Mr. P. G. Wodehouse. Most of us are grateful for *brass tacks*, *pep*, *boom*, *slump*, *sob-stuff*, etc., and I cannot suppress an indecent chuckle when Mr. Wooster delivers himself of the opinion, 'There, Jeeves, you spoke an imperial quart.' Unfortunately, 'refined' American is also penetrating peacefully, and I confidently expect that the English undertaker will soon describe himself as a *mortician*, a description which appears to be modelled, by a natural association, on *physician*. Is there any hope of stemming the flood? As long as democracy remained illiterate,

it spoke historic English dialects, only slightly, and naturally, affected by foreign elements. Now that democracy is no longer illiterate (I mean of course in a purely technical sense), it seizes eagerly on every linguistic novelty and shows a marked preference for the puerile and the tasteless. Our language, even in its colloquial form, is largely the creation of two mighty factors, viz. the Authorized Version of the Bible and Shakespeare. The chief influence now being exercised upon it is that of the film magnates, who advertise their goods in such language as the following description of a film entitled *A Miracle City*—‘The glamour, ecstasy and heroism of Hollywood, hiding its own heartbreak to inspire the world with glorious illusion’. Two demons are fighting for the soul of our language, the broadcasting demon of standardization and the cinema demon of vulgarity. The experience of history suggests that democracy will choose, in the matter of language, the wide gate and broad way that leadeth to destruction. And yet the question suggests itself that even chaos may be better than entering in at the strait gate of standardization. For from chaos may be evolved a new harmony, but petrification is final. If, and when, all the imaginative elements have been squeezed out of our language, when the dialects, which, in the past, have supplied to literature so much that is racy of the soil, have finally given way to a standard speech, we shall have the perfect instrument of practical life. One thinks inevitably of the broad racing-tracks that are steadily replacing our winding,

tree-shaded country lanes. Their practical value is undeniable and future generations may find beauty in them. May we conjecture that such a possible transformation of English will have as a result the creation of a new ideal in literature and poetry, a kind of 'hammer and sickle' conception of artistic composition in harmony with a new conception of life?

And so we come back to what is supposed to be the subject of this paper, viz. possible 'improvements' in the English language, and to the conclusion that the only possible improvement, if such it can be called, is the purely mechanical device of a reformed spelling. For the rest, to the lovers of English one can only recommend the defensive, and hope that, at least during our own time, a kind of Old Guard may still stand firm in the rout. The idea that a language can be 'improved' by deliberate effort is fantastic. It can only be standardized, i.e. emasculated and bled white. Language is idiom. Standardization must gradually kill idiom and degrade language to the level of the Morse code. In the first glow of the Renaissance the delusion of assisted progress was natural and common. Joachim du Bellay, in his *Deffence et Illustration de la Langue Francoyse* (1549), called upon his contemporaries to ennoble the French language by cultivation, elaborating the gardening metaphor at considerable length. Quite recently a man of science, Sir Richard Paget (*Babel, or the Past, Present and Future of Human Speech*), has asked whether languages might not be made more

useful by conscious effort on our part. 'So far', he says, 'there has been no horticulture of language, only botany.' The 18th century even believed that language had reached perfection and should be stabilized. Boswell described Johnson as 'the man who had conferred stability on the language of his country', and Voltaire considered that, if the French Academy would issue 'corrected editions' of Racine, Molière, Bossuet, etc., the purity of the French language would be for ever fixed. The student of language has no such illusions. He knows that the only possible attitude for the educated is a prudent defensive and that the most heroic defensive must in the end give way to the big battalions.

CHAPTER II

WORD-STUDY FOR THE YOUNG

IT was not without hesitation that I complied with the request to give the final lecture of this course on the Teaching of English in Elementary Schools. The subject prescribed, the Study of Words, is to my way of thinking most worthy of all subjects to occupy the attention of the intelligent, but the problem of bringing the mind of the school-child into contact with the glories of the world of words seems to present almost insuperable difficulties. It is evident, to begin with, that it is only in the senior classes of the schools that it will be possible to handle the simpler aspects of word-history, and that the subject will have to be treated, for the most part, with reference to English only, isolated from foreign tongues and from the general theory of language. Furthermore, those teachers who are enthusiasts for word-lore, which is equivalent to saying all intelligent teachers, will need to curb their enthusiasm and beware of stifling a budding interest by over-cultivation.

In using the word interest, I am perhaps begging the question, for can we assume that such a feeling can be aroused in the average modern child by a subject so devoid of practical application or voca-

tional utility? H.R.H. the Duke of York, recently addressing a gathering of engineers, remarked that the contemporary child is 'surprisingly mechanically minded'. This is tragic, but true. The intelligent boy of the present day is much more likely to develop into one of those malefactors who constantly add new horrors to the half-mechanized world in which we live than to trouble his head about 'Words, words, words'. But a pretty long experience in teaching has convinced me that, properly approached, young people are often 'surprisingly verbally minded', and that, once the taste has been acquired, their appetite for interesting facts about the origin and history of words becomes insatiable. Even the mechanically minded youngster may learn with some satisfaction that his favourite word *engine* is related to *ingenious* and is identical with the old-fashioned *gin*,¹ a mechanical device or trap. If he is a Lancashire boy, he may further desire to know whether the *gin* which frees cotton from its seeds is also identical, which it is. A little cunning on the part of the teacher (for our fish must be played gently) may evoke an inquiry as to why an ardent spirit² should have the same name, and this may lead on to the whole subject of the homonyms and homophones which, owing to our incorrigibly lazy trick of shortening and telescoping words, abound in our language as in no other. One can even imagine the mechanically

¹ Fr. *engin*, from Lat. *ingenium*.

² This *gin* is short for *geneva*, a perversion of Fr. *genièvre*, from Lat. *juniperus*.

minded boy turning up the next day with a collection of similar homonyms and demanding an explanation. This may mean toil and trouble for the teacher, but may also be the beginning of a life-interest which will later on serve the mechanically minded boy as a pleasant relief from his barbarous everyday pursuits.

Such a rescue of a brand from the burning is an extreme case. Let us now consider how it may be possible to arouse in an average group of boys and girls some interest in the language we speak, most of us very incorrectly. It is obvious that this problem concerns primarily the teacher whose specific job it is to give instruction in English. I do not know how the subject is taught now. When I was introduced to it at the age of six, I learnt as a preliminary that the parts of language are orthography, etymology, syntax and prosody, rich and mouth-filling words, of which I found out the meaning some years later. I say deliberately 'found out', for in those heroic days explanation did not enter into educational method. Later on came parsing and the analysis of sentences, soul-destroying exercises as they were then handled. I do not remember a glimmer of word-history ever breaking through the dull clouds of the English grammar lesson, and I should have left school at eighteen without any idea that English Past and Present is the most fascinating of studies, had it not been for a bookish home and a bookish father always ready to answer questions. No doubt things are very different now, but I wonder whether the

outlined history of the language finds a place in the higher-class curriculum of elementary schools. It might very well be included, especially if the teacher of English can come to terms with the teacher of history, so that two inseparable subjects should not remain separated. I do not mean that the teacher should run the risk of extinguishing curiosity by a series of lectures, but that he should now and then take advantage of circumstances for a brief excursus that will fit into a general scheme. For instance, the word *clan* turns up in reading. Is it English? Where did it come from? Where is Gaelic still spoken? What other Celtic languages are still spoken in the British Isles? How does Welsh survive in Wales and how is Erse being revived in Ireland? What is the ancestor of these languages? Why did the Anglo-Saxons not adopt more than half a dozen words from the conquered Britons? Why did English gradually borrow a few later? Why, for instance, *flannel* from Welsh and *whisky* from Gaelic, and what does *whisky*¹ mean? How came in the later words, such as *claymore* and *slogan*, *cairn*, *corrie* and *loch*? Here one might turn aside and moralize on the present idiotic use of *slogan*² and point out that it had, like *boss*, the governor, to cross the Atlantic twice in order to acquire its popular meaning. Why have we taken *shamrock* and *shanty* from Irish? It seems to me that a period partly spent on this

¹ Short for *usquebaugh*, Gaelic *uisge-beatha*, water of life, 'eau-de-vie'.

² See p. 79.

theme might help to illuminate the past and enlarge the perspective of the present. Finally, before leaving the Celts, the teacher of geography might be enlisted in the good cause. He could point out to his pupils that, while our towns and villages were named by the Anglo-Saxon and Danish immigrants as *-tons*, *-hams*, *-buries*, *-bys*, etc., our hills and streams keep their ancient British names, that our *Ouses*, *Avons*, *Esks* and *Usks* are simply Celtic names for water and that *Esk* and *Usk* are ultimately identical with *whisky*.

With the Anglo-Saxons we come to the foundation of English speech. It is gratifying to know that a certain amount of German is now being taught in the higher forms of schools. When this is the case, we have already, for an intelligent teacher and intelligent pupils, the beginnings of comparative philology! At any rate it should be possible to communicate a few elementary facts about the European family of languages. In fact, I remember how, as a young schoolmaster, I delivered to a class in a very 'churchy' school what seemed to me then quite an illuminating little discourse on the subject, the effect of which was rather spoilt by the paralysing question—'But how about the Tower of Babel, sir?' I forget how I wriggled out of the dilemma. It is fairly easy to make young people understand that English is related to German, but not derived from it, though this elementary fact will remain for ever hidden from the amateur philologist who communicates his 'discoveries' to the correspondence

column of the papers. It should even be possible to arrive, without any pedantic effort, at a simple inductive discovery of Grimm's law and to create an innocent enthusiasm for collecting examples. But, quite apart from such comparisons, the teacher of English would do well to emphasize the fact that, huge as is now our store of nearly half a million words, our language remains Teutonic by its fragmentary remains of grammatical structure and its essential vocabulary. He might even, in these days of cross-word enthusiasm, invent new word-games, such as calling upon his class to spot the two 'foreign' words in such a stanza as—

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

Although such ideas do not come properly within the modest sphere of a humble word-hunter, one cannot help hoping that an intelligent appreciation of the beauty of Anglo-Saxon speech might do something towards creating a taste for simplicity of language and a distaste for those words of learned length and thundering sound which now so often serve as a barrage to mask the advance of confident ignorance. A solemn pledge might even be exacted that under no circumstances would any self-respecting boy or girl ever use the insulting word *proletarian*¹ for the dignified *working-man* or sully

¹ The Roman *proletarii* were regarded as assisting the state merely as 'begetters of offspring'.

lips or paper with the rather absurd *meticulous*, of which the late H. W. Fowler wrote—‘What is the strange charm that makes this wicked word irresistible to the British journalist?’ Quite recently I read, in one of those shockers to which, like many other students, I am an addict, of a hero, clad, it need not be said, in ‘immaculate’ evening-dress, who ‘selected a cigarette with meticulous care’, which is rather like carefully scrutinizing a sheet of penny stamps before deciding on an irrevocable choice. It is perhaps too optimistic to hope that the next generation will abstain from calling an invitation or suggestion a *gesture* and from tending to substitute *proposition* for every other abstract noun in the language. By simplicity of speech I do not mean simplification, though it has been truly said that this word is the key-note of the history of our language. There is a difference between gradual and automatic simplification and the drastic nostrums which are occasionally recommended by linguistic quacks. I understand that Mr. James Maxton, if appointed world dictator, would impose a common language on all nations, that language to be a simplified form of English, presumably as already used in Chinese ports or on the west coast of Africa. Well, it may come to that. Already the language employed by the vanguard of our modernistic writers in prose and verse does not noticeably differ from pidgin English.

In dealing with Anglo-Saxon speech the teachers of history and geography should do their modest bit. For instance, it should not be difficult to

elicit, via our modern 'moot point' and to 'moot a question', the linguistic fact that the *Witenagemot* was the meeting of the witty, or that *Middlesex*, *Essex* and *Sussex* represent various settlements of the *Saxons*, and that two branches of a kindred *folk* settled in the North and South of East Anglia.

That same word *folk* might serve as an introduction to the biggest event in the history of our own, perhaps of any, language, the Norman Conquest, to which English owes its incomparable wealth of vocabulary, its infinite power of expressing subtle shades of meaning, and its practical abolition of all that inflexional lumber which still makes the study of German a weariness. A comparison between the popular *folk* and the formal and administrative *people* might lead to an easy discussion of the parts played by the two great elements in our language. Here one could not do better than start with Scott's famous cliché in the first chapter of *Ivanhoe*, where Wamba moralizes sagely on the native *oxen*, *swine*, *sheep* and *calves* tended by the vanquished Englishman and the French-named *beef*, *pork*, *mutton* and *veal* which appeared on the table of the victorious Norman. There is confirmatory evidence in the fact that though the *baker* is pure Anglo-Saxon, the *butcher* is of French origin. That the Anglo-Saxon *brewer* persisted might perhaps be taken as an indication that the vanquished were not altogether without consolation. An intelligent Socratic method (and I am assuming that modern educational methods are essentially intelligent) should elicit an explana-

tion of the fact that *judge, jury, assize, prison, gaol*, etc., our names for crimes such as *larceny, arson, embezzlement*, etc., even *honesty* and its opposite, our chief titles of office and nobility, and, in fact, our administrative vocabulary in general, are of Norman-French origin, while the words for the commonest everyday objects, actions and qualities belong to the Anglo-Saxon stock.

It may be doubted whether most boys and girls realize that for nearly three centuries after the Conquest two languages were spoken in England, French by the court, nobility and gentry, English by the common people, and that, nearly up to the time of Wyclif and Chaucer, all official and legal enactments and documents were either in Latin or in Norman-French. When, at Crécy, Edward III decided to let his son 'win his spurs', it was in French, not English, that his decision was announced. The two languages, at first only rubbing at the edges, gradually penetrated each other to produce the most wonderful blend in linguistic history, the ultimate choice of words illustrating the biological doctrine of the survival of the fittest. Here we might put some problems before our young friends. Why, for instance, did the Anglo-Saxon *earl* survive in the hierarchy among the Norman titles? Was it because of the existence of *count* in another sense? Why, when all the parts of the body bear, except in scientific anatomy, Anglo-Saxon names, did we adopt the one word *face* from French? Did the native word *arm* (poor) give way to the Norman-French *poor* because of the existence

of the noun *arm*? If these questions cannot be settled, at least they can be profitably discussed.

This unparalleled linguistic phenomenon of the blending of two languages into one has for me a great fascination. I have read recently that the cultural superiority which the Germans enjoy over us, as shown, for instance, by their taste in reading (one gathers that German professors do not read detective novels), is partly due to a clarity of thought which results from unity of language, e.g. that the mental transition from the verb *sterben*, to die, to the adjective *unsterblich*, immortal, is less productive of confusion than the English correlation of two quite unrelated words. This may be so, but, from the point of view of effective and vivid expression, the gain on our side is immense. We have not only *immortal*, but also *undying* and *deathless*, expressing different shades of meaning, e.g. we should not speak of *immortal* admiration or affection. *Solitude* is a French or Latin equivalent of the German *einsamkeit*, but we have also our native *loneliness*, which expresses something more. Similarly it seems to me that such triplets as *kingly*, *royal* and *regal* supply us with shades of meaning which German, with its solitary *königlich*, cannot express adequately. This is a point to be stressed by teachers when they try to make their pupils realize the unequalled wealth of their linguistic inheritance.

Before we leave the Anglo-Saxons, I should like to entreat teachers to make their pupils realize the historic dignity of our disappearing dialects. Lon-

lon boys and girls do not come regularly into contact with any dialect except their own, but perhaps most of them, in occasional visits to the country, are struck now and then by the 'funny way of talking' of the rustic. Well, this same 'funny way of talking', though now too often leached by a mixture of imbecile cinema jargon, represents more correctly than any other form of speech the ancient stream of true English which began to flow in this country some centuries before the days of Alfred the Great. A realization of the countryman's linguistic superiority might help to encourage that sense of modesty which is said to be sometimes lacking in the contemporary young of our species.

At that point, so far as the constitution of our vocabulary goes, we have to stop, for our pupils are, for our particular purpose, even worse placed than Shakespeare, who knew little Latin and less Greek. This I regret, for in matters educational I am a die-hard conservative, a hide-bound reactionary and all the other things so objectionable to enlightenment. Like Anatole France, '*Je porte aux études latines un amour désespéré*', and, like George Borrow's father, I hold that no boy ever came to a bad end who had thoroughly mastered the Latin primer. In fact, I sometimes wonder whether the whole elaborate and costly machinery of modern education produces a more clear-thinking and hard-working type than did those bygone centuries when the simple apparatus of instruction was represented by those two comparatively inex-

pensive instruments—a Latin grammar and a birch-rod. I feel that these views will not be popular with my present audience. Still, you cannot talk to boys and girls about the English tongue without telling them that we began to borrow Latin and Greek words from the time of the early Christian missionaries, that a *disciple* is Latin for a learner, an *apostle* Greek for a messenger, that a *parson* is the ‘person’ locally representing the church and a *bishop* an overseer or supervisor; that, long before the missionaries came, the Roman engineers had made the *mile*, their thousand paces, the unit of road-measurement, and introduced the Latin name for a fort into *Lancaster*, *Winchester*, etc.; that our language was, when learning revived, flooded with Latin words needed to express new abstract ideas and that our modern scientific terms are manufactured, sometimes very ignorantly, from Greek material. How far excursions may profitably be made into these dead regions is doubtful, but I should recommend a few mild experiments. For instance, at a time when dictatorships, whether of Mussolinis or of the proletariat, are much recommended by certain schools of thought, it should be possible to say something of the connection between *dictation* in school and *dictators* in politics, whence one might digress to the ultimate consanguinity of *villas* and *villains*,¹ *radicals* and *radishes*.² The last word might suggest some

¹ A Fr. *vilain* was a serf attached to a *ville*, originally a landholder's residence, Lat. *villa*.

² Lat. *radix*, root.

remarks on the agricultural and horticultural importance of the Romans. It could be pointed out that our only native fruit-names are the *apple* and the *berry* and that almost the only familiar vegetable to which we do not give an ultimately Latin name is the humble *bean*, a fact which may account for the numerous figurative senses that we give to that useful growth. Even when we come to the Greek element, the words involved will be more intelligently used if children are told the original meaning of *statics*, *dynamics*, of prefixes like *hydro-* and *tele-* (and here a protest might be entered against such an atrocity as *televiwer*), of suffixes like *-phil* and *-phobe*. As they will all have heard of *hydrophobia*, why not tell them that it means 'fear of water' and explain the erroneous belief which led to the coining of the word?

We are told nowadays to think internationally, or at any rate Europeanly, and here language is a valuable clue to our foreign relations in the past, whether almost pre-historic or quite recent. We have lately heard a great deal about *pepper*,¹ and it is interesting to note that this word came, along with *sugar*, from the East and penetrated all the European languages in pre-historic times, just as *tea* and *coffee* did at a much later date. Why did our ancestors prosecute so relentlessly the search for pepper, as also for ginger, nutmeg, cloves and cinnamon? If the history teacher is unable to answer the question, he should confer with the

¹ An attempt to 'corner' this condiment had led to some bad commercial disasters.

cookery expert. Why have we borrowed so many terms of art and music from Italy, by what route did such Spanish words as *lasso* and *mustang* reach us, and how is it that we have so many Portuguese travellers' words, such as *cobra*, *fetish*, *palaver*, etc. ? One might even make a little excursus on the now familiar *padre*, a chaplain, and the long journey it has made between Portugal and England. How is it that German has made so little contribution to our vocabulary and Russian practically none till recent times, and what is the meaning of the mystic words *soviet* and *bolshevist* ? How comes it that the only familiar Turkish word that passed directly into English is the indispensable monosyllable *bosh* ? ¹ Why should we naturally expect to find a considerable early contribution from Hebrew, and owing to what historical events did Arabic words come pouring into the European languages in the Middle Ages ? Will such facts interest our young people ? Well, it depends how they are served up.

One fact which they can easily be brought to realize is that they all use three languages, i.e. three forms of their own language—one in the playground, another in the school-room, and a third when they attempt literary composition. Their experiences in the last of these, together with class-room explanations of passages in prose and verse, should make them realize what an immense store of picturesque and expressive words are left unemployed in the everyday activities of

¹ From its frequent use in Morier's Eastern novel *Ayesha* (1834).

life, for instance, the *hallow* and *trespass* of the Lord's Prayer, the *steed* on which Young Lochinvar rode, the *bequeath* and *bequest* which are only used by lawyers, the *welkin* which now limits its activity to ringing. And, as intelligent word-study is made up of digressions, why not digress in the matter of *welkin*? I remember how, coming across the word in my early explorations of Walter Scott, I vaguely imagined some sort of metallic contraption of peculiar resonance. The discussion of this word really belongs to the geography teacher, who will tell his pupils that *welkin* in Anglo-Saxon means cloud, that later on we borrowed the Old Norse *sky*, which likewise means cloud, that in other European languages the name for sky also means heaven, from which it is easy to initiate a discourse on climate and to deduce that the English variety is not much to boast of.

This whole question of the disappearance of expressive words from our vocabulary and of their supersession by the commonplace is one of the most curious chapters in word-history. Few of us would now describe a 'daughter fair' as 'buxom, blithe and debonair'; fewer still, perhaps, would connect *blithe* with *bliss*, know anything about the curious history of *debonair*, or realize that for Milton the word *buxom*¹ contained no suggestion of an agreeable plumpness. Perhaps *debonair* may come back into use, if we ever revive the quality it describes. For the resurrections of words are often curious: until the War one vaguely associated

¹ See p. 139.

*jerkin*¹ with the costume of Robin Hood, but after the War 'army jerkins' were to be had cheap. *Pillion* used to belong to the historical novel; or it suggested a buxom farmer's wife going to church on horseback with her arms clasped round her husband's ample circumference; it has come back in connection with one of the most popular forms of suicide. Until the last few years the archaic *wallet* was the pilgrim's scrip or an article carried by the picturesque mendicant. With the disappearance of gold coin it has come into use as a receptacle for paper money, a sense it had long had in America, whence, in fact, the word has been re-imported. *Bandits* were formerly Italians, picturesque in costume and impressive in armament; now that they are revived, they ride in motor-cars. And what does *bandit*² mean?

When we leave the question of the death of words for that of their birth in modern times, we are confronted by a problem too vast to be handled as an item in one lecture. I would only entreat the science teacher not to let his pupils use newly coined scientific terms without understanding how they are formed and what they mean. Similarly, I would entreat the English teacher to punish severely any boy guilty of such expressive Americanisms as *pep* and *fan*, *snag* and *wash-out*, unless he can give a rational answer to the questions 'Why *pep*? Why *fan*? Why *snag*? Why *wash-out*?³

¹ 'Archaic or historical' (Oxf. Dict.).

² Ital. *bandito*, banished man.

³ Originally American, of damage by flood to a railway or road.

Loosely associated with the phenomena of verbal birth and death is the phenomenon of change of meaning. The Lord Chief Justice remarked last week that 'Our language seems to be undergoing a progressive demoralization until finally a term comes to mean the exact opposite of that which it was intended to mean'. Demoralization is too strong a word. Changes of meaning come about gradually and inevitably, sometimes, it is true, even culminating in a complete reversal of sense, e.g. we understand by a *restive* horse one that will not stand still, whereas it originally meant one that would do nothing but stand still, in fact, a horse of 'restful' tastes. The tracing of such evolutions in sense may be made as instructive as any other kind of scientific reasoning. For the Anglo-Saxon a *knave* was a boy (as German *knabe* still is), especially a lad in somebody's employ, and a *knight* was a servant (as German *knecht* still is). By what steps did these once synonymous words reach their present widely differing meanings? The history teacher will of course explain to his pupils that the latter word gradually attained its present dignity via the expression 'the king's knights'. This might lead to a discussion of the word *king*, of special interest just now,¹ and its original meaning of tribal chief. I need hardly warn my hearers against giving heed to the theorizing on such subjects of Carlyle and other amateurs. How has *talent*, a Greek name for a weight or a

¹ The lecture was given shortly before King George V's Silver Jubilee.

sum of money, acquired the sense of mental aptitude, and by what process has *pound*, from the Latin word for weight, come to be applied to a scrap of paper signed by the chief cashier of the Bank of England? How did the word *story*, an abridged form of *history*, acquire the sense of a floor of a house? The explanation will be found in the great Oxford Dictionary and nonsensical suggestions in most other dictionaries. And here I should like to give a piece of advice to the school librarian. Not every school can afford the Oxford Dictionary with its twenty ponderous half-volumes, but all should have the new Webster, American, it is true, but etymologically far ahead of anything published at a moderate price in this country.

I am supposed to be addressing especially teachers of English, but I should like to enlist all teachers in the good cause. The mathematician should explain to his pupils that a *furlong* was originally a 'furrow-long', that *rods*, *poles*, *perches* and *yards* were simply sticks, and an *acre* a vague word for a field as in the *Longacre* which was a meadow in the days when St. Martin's Church was still literally 'in the Fields'. The teacher of botany might note that the *magnolia*, now in full bloom, bears the name of a famous French botanist and go on to the *lobelia*, *fuchsia*, *dahlia*, etc.; he might touch on the poetic fancy to which we owe the *Canterbury bell* and one still more ancient which gave to our commonest homely flower the pretty name of the *day's eye*. I am perhaps outlining a rather too ambitious programme and reminding you of the

Athenian cobbler; but I feel that the first preliminary to interesting children in word-history is to interest their teachers to an extent perhaps beyond childish comprehension. The selection and simplification can be left to those of more experience than the lecturer.

There is one aspect of word-history which makes a direct and simple appeal even to immature minds, that aspect which deals with the words that we call names. I have lately given some informal talks to schools on the family names of the pupils, and, from information received, I gather that the boys and girls were really less bored than they expected to be. The subject is best handled by the history teacher, who should, however, administer his information in homœopathic doses. On one occasion he might discuss the existence of such apparently impossible names of occupation as *King*, *Prince*, *Earl*, or *Bishop* and *Abbott*. On another, in connection with the organization of medieval England, he might touch on *Squire*, *Franklin*, *Burgess* and *Hind*. He might encourage a *Moody* with the information that his name originally meant courageous or squash an assertive *Best* by revealing to him the bovine character of his ancestors. The importance of the medieval cloth industry might be illustrated by Messrs. *Fuller*, *Tucker* and *Walker*, that of medieval archery by the native *Arrowsmith* and the Norman *Fletcher*. The way in which local surnames originated can be explained from any class-list, and such names as *Shakespeare* and *Drinkwater* could be

used as examples of a type of word-formation of which we have almost lost the secret.

These are necessarily only the vaguest indications of the way in which familiar and usually unregarded facts in word-history may serve to throw some light on the habits and customs of our ancestors. There is another branch of the same subject that should have a natural appeal to London boys and girls. I spent my schooldays in the midst of historic surroundings. Were those surroundings ever used to give reality and interest to the history lesson? The answer is in the negative. We learnt dates. But you are living in enlightened times and children are taught by enlightened teachers. I cannot believe that these teachers will let their pupils leave school without learning something about the local nomenclature of the most wonderful city in the world. Certainly every boy ought to know whence his particular suburb or district has its name, e.g. that *Acton* is the 'oak-farm', *Lambeth* the 'hythe' or quay where 'lambs' were landed, just as *Rotherhithe* was named from *rother* or cattle, that *Camden Town* only dates from 1791, when Lord Camden let out the land on building leases, while *Kentish Town* was, as early as the year 1200, a rural settlement of immigrants from Kent, that *Mile End* is one mile distant from Aldgate on the Colchester Road, that *Smithfield* is the 'smooth field', and that *Marylebone* took its name from the 'Mary bourn', a brook, like the *Holborn*, or stream in the hollow, and that *Marybourn*, from a church of St.

Mary on its bank, replaced the older Tyburn on account of the grisly hanging associations of the older name. Judicious questioning might elicit an explanation of the *West* in *Westminster*, of the original purpose of the *Temple* and of the meaning of the *Strand*. It might even be possible to conjure up a picture of the Strand as it was when the Protector Somerset built his great country mansion on the river-bank. I may be mistaken, but I fancy that many London boys would be interested to know that *Tooley* Street was once St. Olave Street, that *Leather Lane*, *Gutter Lane* and *Fetter Lane* have nothing to do with leather, gutters or fetters, and that *Clerkenwell* is named from the well, still represented by the pump in Ray Street, where, according to old Stow, 'the parish clerks of London were accustomed yearly to assemble and to play some large history of Holy Scripture'. All this has its dangers. There is always the inquiring boy who wants to know, you know, and he may give the hard-working teacher a little more work. The latter will probably have to consult the authorities occasionally, and I hope he will consult the right ones, for there are no subjects, except perhaps economics and politics, on which so much nonsense has been written as on personal names and place-names.

In preparing these remarks I have tried to put myself in the position, which I should no doubt fill very incompetently, of a teacher confronting a class of about forty children, varying greatly in intelligence, interests and home surroundings. I

have left the authorities unconsulted and touched unsystematically on simple aspects of word-lore which occurred to me as likely to appeal to the young. Many of the said young would probably regard the whole subject as 'tosh', unworthy of the attention of a mechanical age, but there may always be a faithful few, the five righteous who might have saved the doomed cities from destruction, and some of these may be inspired with a lasting intellectual joy and come eventually to realize the truth of what Archbishop Usher said to John Evelyn, when he recommended to the diarist 'the study of philology above all human studies'.

CHAPTER III

THE OXFORD DICTIONARY SUPPLEMENT

A FEW years ago I contributed to the *Atlantic Monthly* an article on English dictionaries,¹ tracing their development from the tiny pocket volumes of the early 17th century down to the gigantic, and at that time incomplete, *New English Dictionary*, now officially known, from its editorial home, as the *Oxford English Dictionary*, O.E.D. In 1928 the great enterprise was brought to a triumphant conclusion, and the two surviving editors of the *Big Four*, Sir William Craigie and Dr. C. T. Onions, at once set to work on the *Supplement*, for which material had been accumulating since the very inception of the main work. On November 14 of last year (1933) this final volume, conceived on the same massive scale as its predecessors, was issued to an expectant public. By the generosity of the Clarendon Press a copy has been presented gratis to every possessor of the ten mighty tomes which constitute the original O.E.D.

The new work aims not only at registering and explaining all new words (and what hosts of them there are!) which have acquired civic rights in the

¹ Reprinted in my *Adjectives—and Other Words* (John Murray, 1930).

English language since the corresponding part of the O.E.D. was printed. It also picks up stragglers, accidentally or in some cases intentionally omitted in earlier years, supplements the information already given in many cases, corrects, modifies or amplifies. In addition it contains an Historical Introduction, a sort of biography of the enterprise, and a complete catalogue of every book, record or periodical from which the two million illustrative quotations are derived.

The inception of this great lexicographical undertaking dates from a conversation, in 1857, between Dr. Furnivall and Dean (later Archbishop) Trench, which resulted in a paper 'On some Deficiencies of our English Dictionaries', read to the Philological Society in November of the same year. The enthusiastic and pugnacious Furnivall, who almost up to the time of his death (1910), at the age of eighty-six, might have been seen sculling in all weathers on the Thames, lived to see a great part of the Dictionary completed. Trench, whose *Study of Words* (1851) and *English Past and Present* (1855) first made the treasures of word-lore accessible to the educated public, died in 1886, a few years after the first sheets went to print. The association with the Philological Society has persisted up to the present day, the Dictionary being described on the title-page as 'founded mainly on the materials collected by the Philological Society', but the actual carrying out of the work is due to the munificence and public spirit of the Oxford University Press.

The final performance went far beyond the original plan, which did not aim at much more than supplementing the dictionaries of Johnson and Richardson, still considered authoritative in the middle of the 19th century. As material accumulated, the scheme became more ambitious, and, after a long period of incubation, a formal contract was concluded in 1879 between the Philological Society and the Delegates of the Oxford Press, and J. A. H. Murray, later Sir James Murray, was appointed editor. He started work 'in an iron building, detached from his house', at Mill Hill School, Middlesex, where he was a master, his first batch of material being a ton and three-quarters of manuscript forwarded by Furnivall.

A great proportion of this material came from America, and Murray, in his Presidential Address to the Philological Society in 1880, spoke very cordially of 'the kindness of our friends in the United States, where the interest taken in our scheme, springing from a genuine love of our common language, its history, and a warm desire to make the Dictionary worthy of that language, has impressed me very deeply'. He could, at that date, hardly have foreseen how impressively American vocabulary and American usage would bulk in the Supplement of more than half a century later, and, if lexicographers are allowed to look down from the celestial abode which seems the due reward of their herculean labours, he must be amazed to see one of his younger co-editors, Sir William Craigie, occupying the Chair of English in

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the University of Chicago and busied with the history of the American language.

The first section of the Dictionary was sent to the printers on April 19, 1882, and published on February 1, 1884. A searching review in the Academy by Henry Bradley led to his being invited to share in the editorship. Murray and his 'Scriptorium' moved in 1885 to Oxford, whither Bradley also migrated some years later. The Delegates of the Press, anxious to accelerate the progress of the work, which eventually took forty-four years instead of the contemplated ten, proposed further editorial assistance; so W. A. Craigie was invited from St. Andrews to Oxford and began work as a full editor in 1901, the same dignity being attained in 1914 by C. T. Onions, who had been helping in the work since 1895. These two younger editors, left to carry on the work by the deaths of Murray (1915) and Bradley (1923), both at a ripe old age, have now set the coping-stone on this great linguistic and national work by the production of the Supplement.

To students of language the O.E.D. is a sort of recurring marvel which never loses its glamour, but those who use it intensively know how it improves volume by volume in scope, thoroughness and elaboration of detail. It is natural that the earliest volumes should be those most in need of additions. This may be illustrated by the fact that the first part of the Supplement, A to K, hardly corresponding to a third of the original Dictionary, forms five-eighths of the new volume. The first

word in the Supplement is the South African Dutch *aasvogel*, vulture (literally, carrion-bird), quoted from Rider Haggard, followed closely by *abalone*, the mollusc familiar to California, 'Spanish, of unknown origin'. *Absquatulate* is to be found in the original A volume, with a quotation from 'Sam Slick', but here we find the supplementary information, 'Said to have been first used by Nimrod Wildfire, a character in a play, The Kentuckian, by Bernard, 1833'.

Naturally there is a big new section on the compounds of *air* in connection with the latest mode of travelling, while 'on the air', in reference to broadcasting by wireless, is dated 1927. I was recently informed by a wireless fan that his infant son 'tuned in about 1 a.m. and was on the air intermittently till about 4.30'. Thus our stock of metaphor is being sifted and transformed! And so, on every page, there are new words, new meanings, earlier dated examples and new bits of information, until we come to *zoom*, with its general application to a humming noise before it became airman's slang.

It is the tragedy of the lexicographer that new words come into existence or earlier information comes to hand while his work is in the press. The Supplement has just missed the acrostic *Nira*,¹ as the original Dictionary did *appendicitis*, coined, as we are here informed, by Fitz in 1886. The earliest O.E.D. record of *Jericho*, as a place of peremptory relegation, is dated 1648, but the recently published

¹ National Recovery Act.

Letters of Stephen Gardiner show that that somewhat intolerant divine used the word in the same sense in 1545. The Daily Express for November 16, 1933, informs us that the 'haywire mind', whatever that may be,¹ has just reached England from America. It is especially difficult to keep up with the political vocabulary. The Supplement has duly booked *Fascist* (1921) and *Nazi* (1930); Signor Mussolini's *black shirts* appear in 1923; but alas for Herr Hitler's *brown shirts* and the United Ireland *blue shirts*, the latter a costume proscribed by the Irish Government on December 9, 1933—they have come too late.

A supplement to the Supplement consists of an extraordinary list of spurious words, or what Skeat called 'ghost-words', originally due to mis-readings, misprints, or misunderstandings, and conscientiously copied from dictionary to dictionary, sometimes with fantastic etymological explanations of the non-existent. It would be unkind to particularize! It is only in the course of such an investigation of a language as has been carried out by the Oxford

¹ My article brought me the following information from Mr. C. A. Richards, 304 East Forty-Fifth Street, New York:

'The origin of this word goes back to the old farm days when bales of hay were tied up with a stiff wire, which, when cut, coiled more or less on itself, with the result that in a short time a pile of wire was accumulated which was almost useless for any practical purpose. Then, when the radio industry first started, some of the earlier sets were known as a "bunch of haywire", because they were so crisscrossed and confused that nobody had any idea where the wires came from or went to. From that, there developed the use of the expression in connection with a person's mind. This is sometimes used as "going haywire", meaning to become mentally unbalanced.'

Dictionary that these impostors can be detected. It is obvious that a 'word' which has found its way into dictionaries without the most diligent search revealing a single example of its use in print is not a word at all.

Roughly speaking, it may be said that the two main blocks of new words are represented by scientific phraseology and Americanisms. Opening the book at random, we find, in addition to the now familiar *heterodyne*, coined in 1908 by Fessenden, no fewer than sixty new compounds of *hetero-* which have been called into existence by the progress of science. Really, the way these people treat the language! Many users of the Supplement will probably turn at once to *relativity*, to find that it was first used, in the scientific sense, by Einstein in 1905, and took its specific modern meaning (which few of us can follow) in 1915. The *thermionic* valve, another mystery to the non-physicist, dates from 1922. Under *quantum* there is an important additional paragraph illustrating its latest sense, 'A discrete unit quantity of energy, proportional to the frequency of radiation, emitted from or absorbed by an atom.'

All this stuff is, of course, rather algebra than language; but, if we turn to science as applied to popular amusement or convenience, we find a whole new vocabulary which has passed more or less into everyday speech. First of all, the *cinema*, which arrived from France too late to get into the original Dictionary. The word is not much used, at any rate in England, modern youth preferring the

pictures', 'movies', 'flickers' or 'flicks'. If we look up *film* in the O.E.D., we shall find no reference to what is now its chief use, first booked in 1897 and abundantly illustrated in the Supplement. It is interesting to note that the 'talking film', projected in 1910 and realized in 1921, became the more convenient *talky* in 1928.

It is to the cinema that English owes a considerable proportion of recent Americanisms. The word *caption* itself, though of fairly old standing in English, was never in popular use till reintroduced with American films. The Supplement's new quotations for the word seem to treat it as a rather humorous neologism, and this writer was rather puzzled many years ago on receiving from an American correspondent a letter referring to a recent article under a certain 'caption'. Our ancestors drew their stock of metaphor from man's essential occupations. Our descendants will draw theirs largely from mechanized life. *Fade-out*, in the figurative sense of a rather furtive departure, is too recent even for the Supplement, though it has 'close-up, fig. a detailed or intimate view'. One has even heard the Characters of Theophrastus described in modern parlance as a 'series of close-ups'. *Black-out*, also missing here, is now used of a temporary loss of memory or failure of the electric light. *Sob-stuff*, perhaps the most expressive term in cinema jargon, but one which did not originally belong to that milieu, crossed the Atlantic in 1920.

Among modern inventions it is inevitably the

cinema, frequented by about 99 per cent of the population, that has made the chief contribution to the figurative language of our day. But any devout student of the works of Mr. P. G. Wodehouse will realize how often his entertaining 'chumps' draw their metaphor from the automobile and the aeroplane. Irresistibly funny, at least to one reader, is the picture of young Bingo Little, laughing 'in an unpleasant, hacking manner, as if he was missing on one tonsil', or of Mr. Slingsby, millionaire soup magnate, stamping in his fury on a golf-ball lying in the vestibule and making a 'forced landing' against the wall.

The post-war period has been very prolific in new political terms, few of which are to be found even in the most up-to-date dictionaries. Of these the two most generally familiar are *soviet* and *bolshevik*, the first a harmless name for council before it acquired its present connotation, the second explained as maximalist, though it also contains the sense of belonging to the majority. *Cheka* and the more recent *Ogpu* are here fully explained as acrostic formations from Russian phrases of rather terrifying aspect, meaning respectively 'extraordinary commission' and 'united state political administration'. With these goes *cadet*, the name of an eliminated Russian political party, which is a kind of pun on K.D., the initial letters, in Russian, of 'constitutional democracy'.

No age has seen such a crop of acrostic words as the war and post-war periods. In fact, the infinite multiplication of new organizations with long and

complicated descriptions made such a device almost necessary. To Englishmen the most impressive of all is *Dora*, a lady of whom the Supplement's earliest quotation prophesies, 'You will become well acquainted with her.' Originally a convenient description of the very essential Defence of the Realm Act of August, 1914, it survives as the name of an uncomely harridan who forbids the patient British public to get a drink when it is thirsty or to buy a much-needed toothbrush after a fixed hour. Visitors from Prohibition countries with vague ideas of an 'alcoholiday' have disliked the lady even more than we do.

The period of 'reconstruction', a word first used in its current sense at the conclusion of the American Civil War, gave birth to many new words or new senses. At the end of the World War *pivotal* men—those essential to various industries—were hastily *demobbed* and attempts were made to supply much-needed man-power for the building and other trades by 'diluting' the skilled-trade unions with partially qualified workers who were illogically called *dilutees*, as though they themselves were to be 'diluted'. Later came, with financial slumps and chaos, the various methods of monkeying with the monetary buzz-saw which made *inflation* a household word, gave a new sense to *deflation*, and created the new term *reflation* (1932).

The original Dictionary was not very hospitable to proper names, but the Supplement is, as explained in the Preface, 'more generous'. *Cassandra*, prophetess of evil, *Jeremiah*, woeful complainer, and

hundreds of similar types, are now included. Especially numerous are the *-isms* and *-ists* with which celebrities or nonentities are constantly endowing the language. It is a testimony to the alertness of the editors that *Hitlerism* is duly booked for 1930, along with the much earlier *Leninism*, *Trotskyism*, and the comparatively recent *Stalinism* (1927), and even *Volsteadism* as a variant name for Prohibition. It is interesting to note that *Marxist*, a sort of ancestor of the whole brood, is recorded for 1886—obviously a word which the original Dictionary might well have included.

This element of vocabulary is, next to the scientific, the most worrying to the lexicographer. In a paper recently read to the English Philological Society, I lamented the absence from the Oxford Dictionary of the word *Comstockery*, exaggerated prudishness. Dr. Onions, who happened to be present, interjected the information that it would be found in the Supplement, with a quotation from Mr. Bernard Shaw. Here it is (1905): 'Comstockery is the world's standing joke at the expense of the United States'. Anthony Comstock¹ is

¹ The Supplement's 'An American opposed to the nude in act' is hardly adequate. Comstock was apparently one of those gifted individuals who can detect indecency in almost everything. 'The passage of the Comstock Postal Act, in 1873, greatly stimulated the search for euphemisms. Once that amazing law was upon the statute-book and Comstock himself was given the inquisitorial powers of a post-office inspector, it became positively dangerous to print certain ancient and essentially decent English words. To this day the effects of that old reign of terror are still visible' (Mencken, *American Language*, p. 150).

pretty well forgotten as an individual, but will survive figuratively as the companion of *Dora* and *Mrs. Grundy*. One misses from the Supplement the much more pleasing *Birrellism*, or literary gossip in the charming style of Augustine Birrell, who died at a very advanced age in November, 1933. *Boswellize*, to write biography from the adorer's point of view, is recorded for 1921, but the Supplement has just missed *deboswellize*, used in reference to Mr. Kingsmill's new Life of Dr. Johnson. This suggests the expressive Americanism *debunk* (1927), best explained as the opposite of 'whitewash'. Among comparatively recent characters in fiction who have become recognized types we find Stevenson's *Jekyll* and *Hyde*, and, of course, *Sherlock Holmes*, even used as a verb; but why not *Watson*?

Apart from purely scientific words, or new compounds expressing new ideas, such as Freud's *psycho-analysis* or the *robot* that we owe to Karel Čapek, modern importations are largely concerned with the less ceremonial side of language. This applies especially to the enormous American contribution of the last twenty or thirty years, the most vivifying influence that colloquial English has ever undergone, though it suggests to Mr. Dooley the reflection that 'when we Americans are done with the English language it will look as if it had been run over by a musical comedy'. At a luncheon given on November 21, 1933, the president of Magdalen College, Oxford, described these new American idioms as 'irresistible in any lexicon, so impudent, so fresh and so near the truth, though

Dr. Johnson would have rejected them as "not yet refined from the grossness of domestic use". Not that the American contribution is purely slang. *Welfare*, as in 'child welfare', 'welfare centre', and so forth, was first used in this special sense in Ohio in 1904. *Uplift*, with which neither the Dictionary nor the Supplement deals quite satisfactorily, is now rather ironical. *Moron*, 'first adopted by the American Association for the Study of the Feeble-minded in 1910', was, according to my information, coined¹ by Dr. H. H. Goddard of Columbus, Ohio. It is a useful term, of an elastic connotation which inspired the poet to sing:

See the happy moron.
He doesn't give a damn.
I wish I were a moron.
My God! Perhaps I am!

But one might hazard the opinion that 99 per cent of the American contribution is distinctly slangy. Opening the Supplement at random, we are confronted at once by the *jay-walker*, the most serious traffic problem of the day, and the mysterious *jazz*, which reached England in 1918. A second dip makes one wonder why, of all vegetables, the American *bean* should lend itself to such wide figurative use, and a third makes one marvel at the extraordinary range of senses acquired in America by the word *dope*, almost as absurdly overworked

¹ An American correspondent, whose letter I have unfortunately lost, points out that the name, from Gr. *μωρός*, foolish, was probably suggested by Molière's Moron, the 'fool' in *La Princesse d'Élide*.

as *proposition*. It would be interesting to trace the process by which the colour *yellow* has become linked with a cowardly temperament, and it is a tribute to the widespread influence of the American language that Soviet Russia has adopted the word, or rather its Russian equivalent, as a description of Labour organizations which hesitate to go the whole hog.

Modern American seems to be particularly rich in synonyms for humbug or 'eyewash'—*bunk*, an abbreviation of *bunkum*; *hokum*, for which the Supplement suggests a 'blending of hocus-pocus and bunkum'; *hooey*, for which no etymology is given; *ballyhoo*, originally the inspiring invitation of the 'barker' at what Mr. Barnum first described as a *sideshow*; and *boloney*, which the Supplement has unfortunately overlooked along with *apple-sauce*. *Boloney* must surely be for *Bologna* sausage (whence also the English *polony*, dating from the 18th century), influenced perhaps by the contemptuous sense associated with the German *wurst*. But why *apple-sauce*?

The influence of German on modern American vocabulary and construction is a fact recognized by philologists. Curious examples are *fresh* (German *frech*, impudent) and *dumb* (German *dumm*, stupid), now familiar colloquialisms with young England.

Probably the two writers who have done most to familiarize us with modern American colloquialisms are Mr. P. G. Wodehouse and the late Edgar Wallace. It is, for instance, from the former that the Supplement quotes its first example of

fifty-fifty, in the sense of sharing equally. But the great interest of modern youth, and even of modern maturity, is crime in all its aspects. If Europe is more or less convinced that the population of the United States is largely composed of *gangsters*,¹ *bootleggers*, *hi-jackers*, *racketeers*, occupied in 'bumping off', 'taking for a ride', 'putting on the spot', and finally undergoing the 'third degree', as an inducement to 'come clean', 'spill the beans', or 'shoot the works', the responsibility rests with the American film and the American crook novel. It is also strange to reflect that the whole vocabulary connected with resistance to Prohibition will henceforth be of purely academic interest. One is surprised to find that the *speak-easy*, in which *easy* is equivalent to softly, flourished as early as 1889 in those 'dry' regions where the bootlegger (1890) was a welcome emissary from the outer world. One is given to understand that this benefactor retailed sound 'licker' and not *hooch*. The last word, from the language of the Alaskan Indians, is recorded in its full form *hoochinoo* for 1899, while the shortened form *hooch* appears in 1903.

This tendency to shorten is characteristic of English on both sides of the Atlantic. Few words have been more welcome in England than *pep*, for *pepper*, recorded in American for 1915, but usually printed in inverted commas in England until the last few years. *Fan*, for *fanatic*, dated 1889 in

¹ With this word, recorded in the current sense for 1911, cf. the very modern *gagster*, at the theatre, and *gongster* (1935), the terror of the motorist.

America, with special reference to baseball, also had the inverted commas in English from 1914 to 1920. It is now fully acclimatized.

Quite apart from deliberate shortening, the monosyllable seems to be peculiarly sympathetic to the English tongue. How can a theatrical failure be better described than as a *flop*, or intuitive knowledge as a *hunch*, and was ever a more useful word imported than *snag*, originally an underwater obstacle in an uncharted stream? I imagine that the opposite of a *flop* is a *wow*, for which the Supplement quotes Edgar Wallace, who, however, finds it necessary to explain the word. As for *blurb* (1924, 'of unknown origin'¹), which the late Poet Laureate, Robert Bridges, described as an 'admirable word, quite indispensable', one is puzzled to know how we expressed this particular variety of *hokum* in earlier days.

Modern colloquial English is being remade by our young people, and these young people are, as already suggested, peculiarly sensitive to the charms of American slang. As this strange tongue is said to change almost daily, it is probable that they are seldom up-to-date, and that the English maiden of ten who expresses ironic incredulity with 'Oh yeah?' or 'Sez you?' is really employing the archaic. Occasionally we are only resuming possession of our own. *Hick*, a country bumpkin, was

¹ According to the new edition of Webster, a work which it is impossible to praise too highly, the word was coined by a Mr. Gelett Burgess, who thus becomes the rival of the late Arthur Roberts (p. 20).

used in one of Sir Richard Steele's plays in 1702, and even *hike*, recently reimported, was familiar English about 1800. I find, by the way, no mention in the Supplement of *hitch-hike*, used, I understand, in America of hiking varied by lifts, legal or illegal. *Jag*, a drinking bout, which I had always imagined to be American, appears to have been familiar rustic English in the 17th century, but the synonymous *bender*, dated 1827, is pure United States, and unknown (the word, I mean) in the United Kingdom.

I will end with one or two miscellaneous remarks. Before the American detective made his triumphant appearance in fiction and on the films, the English detective used to *check* a statement; he now 'checks up on' it, which seems really over-conscientious. No longer does he search a prisoner; he *frisks*¹ him. Instead of consigning him to a police-station cell he puts him in the *cooler* (I am not sure whether this is English or American, and the Supplement is silent about it). Both detectives and criminals now carry *gats*. Such is the impression one gets from detective fiction, but, in a famous murder trial of a few years ago, Scotland Yard's representative stated that he did not know what a *gat* was.

A curious example of replacement is the gradual supplanting of English *tin* by American *can*, as in 'canned lobster', or even 'canned music'

¹ 'Frisking and searching are not at all the same. The police expression to *frisk* a man merely means that the policeman slaps the prisoner wherever he is liable to have a concealed weapon. Searching means an entirely different thing. A man can be both *frisked* and *searched*' (Mr. C. A. Richards).

(not noted by the Supplement). An instance of America's ready acceptance of a word which has hardly caught on in England is *sheikh*, a lady-killer of the cave-man type. The Supplement records him, but omits the obvious etymology from Mrs. E. M. Hull's novel (see p. 22), nor does it mention 'sheikhed up',—dressed to kill,—which I have seen in American fiction. The recent advertisement by a famous London tailor of 'white waistcoats for chic sheikhs' suggests that here again England is eagerly following the American lead.

An American word that has not been very successful in England, although it has had some revival since the World War, is *mugwump*. This Indian word, frequently used by Eliot in the Massachusetts Bible (1661-63), has been recently defined by an English nobleman as 'an animal that sits on the fence, with its mug on one side and its wump on the other'.

CHAPTER IV

WALTER SCOTT AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

THE Observer of March 15, 1931, propounded, by way of competition, the question, 'Which of the immortals would you choose as companion for half an hour's walk?' The six candidates who headed the poll were Shakespeare, Dr. Johnson, Charles Lamb, Socrates, Sir Walter Scott, Julius Cæsar. If all the competitors, before recording their votes, had re-read Washington Irving's charming description of his visit to Abbotsford and his walks with the 'Shirra' in 1817, it is possible that Scott might have headed the list. 'It was', says the American essayist, 'as if I were admitted to a social communion with Shakespeare, for it was with one of a kindred, if not equal genius. . . . The play of his genius was so easy that he was unconscious of its mighty power. . . . I do not recollect a sneer throughout his conversation any more than there is throughout his works.' In fact, to quote the same authority, a 'golden-hearted man'.

It is rather the fashion just now with the illiterate and the immature to depreciate Scott. He is, says a manufacturer of shockers, unreadable. A contemporary lady novelist records her horror at

having been suspected of reading Dickens, explaining that she felt almost as distressed as though she had been accused of reading Scott. It is a pity she did not add Shakespeare, so as to include in one condemnation the three greatest creators of character in English literature, perhaps even in the literature of the world. The result of the Observer election, recording the opinion of the most educated newspaper 'constituency' in the British Isles, would seem to indicate that, for the lettered, Scott is far from being a back number.

The recent publication¹ of two new lives of Walter Scott is a reminder that 1932 is the centenary of that great man's death. We may no doubt look forward to a considerable literary output of Scottiana in the immediate future, but the object of this modest article is to call attention to Scott's contribution to the vocabulary and phraseology of modern English, and to suggest that some student of language should handle the subject with the fullness for which the present writer has not the necessary leisure. It will, I think, be found that, next to Shakespeare, whose influence on English is a phenomenon unique in the history of language, Scott has been our greatest verbal benefactor.

He is not one of the very quotable poets. Leaving out Shakespeare, who stands alone, it may be said that the greatest poets are often not the most quotable. Each of the immortals has given us a few phrases which have become an integral part of

¹ This article appeared in November, 1931.

the English vocabulary, but from all the magnificent poetry of the 19th century cannot be drawn a supply of quotations to compare with that furnished in the 18th century by Pope alone, the neat and sententious. To Scott's vigorous and galloping verse we owe such effective phrases as 'Unwept, unhonoured and unsung', 'Caledonia stern and wild', 'to beard the lion in his den', 'foemen worthy of their steel'; and, although he was a landsman, he is our first literary authority for the phrase 'to nail the colours to the mast', which occurs in the Introduction to *Marmion*, an example overlooked by the Oxford Dictionary. This may not seem a very large contribution to English phraseology, but it is probably as great as that of any other 19th-century poet. The 'crowded hour of glorious life', which is attributed to him in some anthologies, is really a quotation from a poem by T. O. Mordaunt, used by Scott as an epigraph to a chapter of *Old Mortality*.

It is to the prose works that we must go to estimate Scott's importance as a word-maker and phrase-maker. The *Waverley Novels* fall into two groups. We have the romantic historical tales that delighted our boyhood, and which the modern consumer of thrillers finds long-winded and dull. Such are *Ivanhoe*, *The Talisman* and *Quentin Durward*, the greatest of these being *Ivanhoe*. Then there are the immortal stories dealing with periods not too remote from the author's own times, with the scene laid upon his 'native heath' (his own phrase), the Border country and the Lowlands, regions so

rich in that legendary lore which Scott began to absorb in childhood and in which he never ceased to revel. It is to these—Guy Mannering, The Antiquary, The Heart of Midlothian, Rob Roy, and the like—that we turn in our mature years, when the perusal of some ‘courageous’ modern novel impels us to seek the disinfecting society of Dandie Dinmont, Mr. Oldbuck, Davie Deans, Bailie Nicol Jarvie, and the rest of a society of characters and oddities unequalled outside Shakespeare’s works, except perhaps by Dickens.

In these two groups of novels Scott speaks two separate languages. In the first group we have the conventional and unreal language of imaginative romance, in the second the natural pithy speech, racy of the soil, which he had heard all his life from the Lowland burgess and peasant. To write a realistic historical novel of the Middle Ages is, from the language point of view, an obvious impossibility. In *Ivanhoe*, for instance, one-half of the characters would have to talk late Anglo-Saxon, and the other half old Norman-French. To give an archaic atmosphere to the setting, the author goes in for what Stevenson called ‘tushery’, and the result is, to the philological reader, an artificial absurdity. Even in the ‘props’ the most conscientious romance writer may go hopelessly wrong. To take a simple example: In *Ivanhoe* Wamba says to the Black Knight, ‘I have twice or thrice noticed the glance of a morrion from amongst the green leaves.’ In *Marmion* Fitz-Eustace speaks of his ‘basnet’. A morrion, the brimmed helmet

of late Tudor times, is as improbable in the days of Cœur-de-Lion as a basnet, the basin-helmet of the early medieval warrior, at Flodden Field. This may seem pernicky criticism, but I doubt whether a laborious consulter of sources like Charles Reade was ever guilty of any such trifling blunder in *The Cloister and the Hearth*.¹

When we come to the question of language, the incongruities often become ludicrous. Conan Doyle's historical romances are rather good yarns, but the speech of the characters is often laughable. For instance, the epithet ‘young rooster’ applied by a veteran to a prentice warrior is a transplantation to 14th-century English of an Americanism not recorded before 1820.² Leslie Stephen has somewhere likened *Ivanhoe* to the plaster and stucco imitations of ancient carved oak and stonework with which Scott adorned *Abbotsford*, but all this artificiality does not prevent it from being one of the most picturesque stories ever written. We can be thrilled by the picture of *Ivanhoe* and the Templar rushing from the opposite ends of the lists ‘with the speed of lightning’ and meeting ‘with the shock of a thunderbolt’, though we

¹ My mistake ! It has been pointed out to me that Gerard's trick in the fight at the inn antedates phosphorus by nearly two centuries.

² The absurd euphemism *rooster* was lately used by a B.B.C. announcer in reference to the cock-crowing in *Die drei lustigen Gesellen*, and, in a talky, was put into the mouth of the Duke of Wellington (one would have liked to hear the Duke's comments !). A hundred years ago ‘Sam Slick’ told of the lady who delicately explained that her brother was ‘rooster-swain’ of a boat !

know that, in point of fact, they lumbered awkwardly up against each other on dray-horses and jabbed away clumsily with their barge-pole implements till one of them overbalanced and rolled off.

It was Spenser who first, inspired by admiration for Chaucer, set the example of adorning romantic narrative with archaic or pseudo-archaic language. Naturally he committed some howlers, the most famous of which is *derring-do*, which he uses repeatedly in the sense of 'manhood and chivalry'. It is really a misunderstanding of Chaucer. Some of us may be able to recall the thrill which we got from this mouth-filling word in Scott's description of the assault on the castle of Torquilstone, in *Ivanhoe* (ch. 29). Just as Scott lifted the ghost-word *derring-do* from Spenser, so he borrowed the unexplained *arm-gaunt* from Shakespeare. Nobody knows what is meant by Antony's 'arm-gaunt steed', nor did any other writer use the word till Scott introduced an 'arm-gaunt charger' into *Old Mortality*. Occasionally, falling into a trap like Spenser, he made a new word. He is rather fond of *bartizan*, supposed to mean an outwork of a medieval castle. It first occurs in *Marmion*, and is apparently due to his misunderstanding of *bartisene*, an illiterate early Scotch spelling of *bratticing*, from *brattice*, timber-work. It is described by the Oxford Dictionary as a sham antique.¹

¹ This is, however, hardly correct, as similar corruptions are found in the 17th century. See W. M. Mackenzie, *The Medieval Castle in Scotland*.

A word of which the modern currency is entirely due to Scott is *henchman*. A *henchman*, originally a horse-groom, was in Tudor times a kind of page. The 'royal henchmen', also called 'enfants d'honneur', were in the service of the crown till the corps was dissolved in 1565, after which the word dropped out of use. One of its last records is its solitary occurrence in Shakespeare, who uses it of the subject of the quarrel between Oberon and Titania :

Why should Titania cross her Oberon ?
I do but beg a little changeling boy
To be my henchman.

Early in the 18th century the word made a mysterious reappearance in the Scottish Highlands, being recorded and explained in Edward Burt's Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland. It would appear that Burt blundered somewhere, but Scott, always eager for picturesque words, pounced on this apparent Shakespearean survival and used it in *The Lady of the Lake*, repeating, in one of his notes, Burt's very dubious explanation of the term. Like many other words rescued by Scott, *henchman* is now very much alive. It has acquired in America a sense unknown in England—namely, that of an unscrupulous political adherent.

Henchman may or may not be a blunder, but Scott's misuse of *warison* is on a par with Spenser's *derring-do*. *Warison* is an obsolete word with a variety of meanings, such as wealth, possession, reward. In the last of these senses it occurs in the old ballad on the Battle of Otterburn (or Chevy

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Chase), printed in Bishop Percy's *Reliques of
Ancient English Poetry* (1765) :

Mynstrells, playe up for your waryson,
And well quyt it shal bee.

Scott, who, like all the Romantics, was an eager student of the *Reliques*, apparently misinterpreted the lines and understood a *warison* to be the signal for the onset, in fact, a 'warry sound' ! Hence we find in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* :

Either receive within thy towers
Two hundred of my master's powers,
Or straight they sound their warison,
And storm and spoil thy garrison.

Warison has not had the fortunate fate of some other sham antiques, though Byron, in *Don Juan*, uses it playfully in his riming gymnastics :

Having wound up with this sublime comparison,

Methinks we may proceed upon our narrative,
And, as my friend Scott says, 'I sound my warison' ;

Scott, the superlative of my comparative—
Scott, who can paint your Christian knight or Saracen,

Serf, lord, man, with such skill as none would share it, if
There had not been one Shakespeare. . . .

Some of our author's coinages are so like genuine antiques that they have not only been accepted as such, but have proved to be useful additions to the figurative material of the language. It is difficult to think of *free-lance* journalism by any other name, and the free-lance journalist would certainly prefer that description to the old label of 'penny-a-liner' ; but the term is no older than *Ivanhoe*, in which it is de Bracy's description of

his company of mercenaries. It is thus purely Scott's invention. Old Scottish law contains allusions to murderers taken 'with the red hand', but it was Scott who, in the same novel, put the adjective *redhanded* into the mouth of Front-de-Bœuf. Whenever things get lively in Parliament, we are sure to read in our morning papers of a 'passage of arms' between Mr. X and Mr. Y. This name for a tournament or jousting encounter did not exist in English till Scott wrote of 'the gentle and joyous passage of arms of Ashby', which is one of the two set pieces of *Ivanhoe*. The word *Norseman* seems the natural alternative for Viking, but does not occur before Scott used it in *Harold the Dauntless*, the last of the long poems he composed before, eclipsed by the meteoric fame of Byron, he turned from poetry to his true vocation.

If Scott had no other title to our gratitude, he would deserve it for the number of Shakespearean words and phrases he revived. The 18th century knew something about Shakespeare, but, under French and Johnsonian influence, had come to regard his language as part of a rugged and uncouth past. Scott was saturated in Tudor literature, and to him, more than to any of his brother Romantics, is due the salving of many of the most expressive words and phrases in the language. Shakespeare himself was apparently the 'only begetter' of the word *fitful*, which he used once only, though in one of his most perfect lines :

Duncan is in his grave ;
After life's fitful fever he sleeps well.

Scott revived it in the opening lines of *The Lady of the Lake*, thus adding a most expressive word to our vocabulary. There is no literary record of a 'towering passion' between Hamlet and Rob Roy, nor of 'coign of vantage' between Macbeth and *The Heart of Midlothian*. It may sound hyperbolic but is nevertheless true that, if Shakespeare had never lived, the English language would be, from the point of view of forceful expression, quite other than it is; but it is equally true that, but for Scott, part of this inestimable element in the language would have been missing. Another of Scott's revivals is 'yeoman's service', first used by Hamlet in describing good and faithful service such as may be expected from a trusty adherent.

Even more important, or at any rate more natural, is the enrichment of English by words from the Border dialects with which Scott was familiar from childhood, and of which he knew the more archaic forms from traditional balladry, from Barbour's Bruce and Blind Harry's Wallace. The very word *borderer*, with its implication of lawless *moss-trooping* (another Scott revival), is not found between Shakespeare and Scott. Shakespeare, in *Henry V*, refers to the 'pilfering borderers' who will 'make road' upon the north during the King's absence in France, and the Oxford Dictionary has no further record before Scott's application of the term to that 'stark, moss-trooping Scott', William of Deloraine. What should we call that pleasing accompaniment of modern warfare known as an 'air-raid' if Scott had not, in *The Lay of the*

Last Minstrel, revived *raid*, the Scottish form of *road* (that is, inroad, foray), which had not made its appearance since Lindesay of Pitscottie's Chronicle of Scotland was written toward the end of the 16th century? *Blackmail*, an inseparable concomitant of our civilization, originally the tribute levied by Highland freebooters on the landowners of the Lowlands, was an obsolescent Scottish term, when it was used, with a long explanatory note and Rose Bradwardine's classic definition, in Waverley. Macaulay was perhaps the first to give it a figurative sense, but its modern currency and meaning appear to have started in America about 1870.

It was Macaulay also who first used *slogan* of a political rallying-cry, but I am not sure which side of the Atlantic is responsible for the contemporary and idiotic use of this 'vogue-word', as Mr. Fowler would call it. Among my cuttings I find:

JUDGE. 'What do you mean by a slogan?'

BARRISTER. 'It is an American advertising term, my lord.'

JUDGE. 'Really! I thought it was the war-cry of a Highland clan.'

The judge is right, as a judge should be. *Slogan* is a Gaelic word meaning army-yell. Adopted by the Lowlands, it became 'sloggorn', a corrupted form which led Chatterton to include it in his pseudo-antique vocabulary as the name of a trumpet (*slug-horn*), an absurdity copied by Browning. It was Scott who made the word familiar:

To heaven the Border slogan rung,
'St. Mary for the young Buccleuch!'

And, greatly as I admire Scott, I almost wish he had left *slogan* to sleep undisturbed.

Another of his picturesque revivals is the 'fiery cross', the cross burnt at one end and dipped in blood at the other, which was passed from hand to hand to assemble the clansmen for war. It is not recorded after 1641, when it is found, oddly enough, in Milton,¹ until the famous description in *The Lady of the Lake*.

It must be remembered that Scott was only the culmination of a great poetic renaissance in Scotland. As early as 1826 there was published at Königsberg a small dictionary intended 'to promote the understanding of the works of Sir Walter Scott, Rob. Burns, Allan Ramsay, etc.' for German readers, so that the credit for the introduction into English of many expressive Scotticisms may have to be shared. Still, it must be remembered that, where Burns had one English reader, Scott had a hundred; hence, whether we find the first record of a new word in his works or elsewhere, its actual adoption is mostly to be ascribed to him. If not the reviver, he was at least the popularizer of *canny* and *uncanny*. The first has been the Southron's natural epithet for Scott's fellow-countrymen, since Edie Ochiltree, in *The Antiquary*, answered an awkward question 'with the caution of a canny Scotchman'. *Uncanny*, now an indispensable word, dates from Dandie Dinmont's impression of Meg Merrilies, in *Guy Mannering*. The somewhat kin-

¹ The old Scottish term and that used by Milton is *fire-cross*, so that Scott is apparently responsible for the current form.

dred adjective *gruesome* was also unknown in literary English before the vogue of the Waverley Novels.

Few words convey more of poetic suggestion than *glamour*. It has that *obscurité indispensable* which Baudelaire regarded as a chief element in the poetic. *Glamour* is the same word as *grammar*, its change of meaning reflecting the medieval conviction that the learning of the clerk bordered on the magical. Burns actually rhymes *glamour* with 'hell's black grammar'. In the 18th century it was used in Scottish vernacular literature of a magic spell, in the phrase 'to cast the glamour'. Its occurrence in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* made it familiar to English readers, for, as is well known, this famous verse romance, published in 1805, had with the limited reading public of the day a success which is now attained only by the lucky thriller or pornographic novel. Other Scottish writers had used *glamour* before Scott, but he is solely responsible for reviving its older form *gramarye*, unrecorded between the 15th century and the 'Lay'. No doubt he found it in Percy's *Reliques*. Unlike *glamour*, now an everyday word, *gramarye* is restricted to the vocabulary of 'tushery'. It is curious to compare with these romantic words the common-place and bookish *vituperate*, which fell into disuse in the 17th century to be reintroduced by Scott in his novels.

It is possible for the authority of a great writer to give to a word a new shade of meaning which gradually replaces the original. This has happened

to *gloom*, formerly used of a lowering, sullen aspect. The current sense of darkness dates only from Milton, for whom the association between the two ideas was naturally very close. What Shakespeare has done in this way is almost beyond computation. As we have seen, Scott occasionally misunderstood the meaning of an archaic word. *Thew*, which we scarcely use except in the plural, originally meant habit, quality, feature. By Shakespeare's time it had come to be used of the general physique or 'habit of body'. Scott revived it in a mistaken sense and, by regularly linking it with 'sinews', gave it the muscular connotation which has prevailed over its true sense. The adjective *bluff* now suggests a combination of the frank, the hearty and the burly. In *Ivanhoe* the epithet is applied to Friar Tuck. Up to the 18th century it meant arrogant, domineering. Horace Walpole speaks of Henry VIII's 'bluff haughtiness'. This may have suggested Scott's 'bluff King Hal', the phrase from which the change of meaning apparently dates.

From about 1600 to 1800 our ancestors had to do without the adjective *stalwart*. It was a very common epithet in Middle English (*stalworth*) and early Scottish (*stalwart*), with an original sense of steadfast, unshakable, but used also as a vague intensive epithet; for example, it could be applied to a castle, a fight or a tempest, as well as to a man. Scott either found it in the old romantic literature in which he delighted or picked it up orally as a dialect survival, and it became one of his favourite epithets, its first occurrence being in

his description of Marmion, 'a stalworth knight, and keen'. It is now one of the few English adjectives that can be used as nouns. A *stalwart* is an uncompromising adherent or admirer, in which sense, according to the Oxford Dictionary, quoting the New York Nation, it was first used by J. G. Blaine, in 1877, to designate those Republicans who were unwilling to give up hostility and distrust of the South as a political motive. Of *smouldering* Dr. Johnson says, 'This word seems a participle, but I know not whether the verb *smoulder* be in use'. The records of the Oxford Dictionary show that the Doctor's doubts were justified. The verb was practically obsolete by about 1600, but Scott revived it in *The Lady of the Lake*, giving it especially the figurative sense in which it is now most familiar :

Still, though thy sire the peace renewed,
Smoulders in Roderick's breast the feud.

Mr. John Buchan, in *No-Man's Land*, speaks of a young gentleman who had 'spent his substance too freely at Oxford' and was now 'dreeing his weird' in the backwoods. In the 18th century this would have been unintelligible, except perhaps to a north-country peasant. *Dree*, to perform, endure, still lingers in the Border counties of England and Scotland, though a few more years of 'education' will probably expel it from country speech. It is in this one phrase, reintroduced into literature by Scott after a lapse of three or four centuries, that *weird* preserves its original sense of fate, destiny,

its conversion into a modern adjective having taken place via the 'weird sisters', the Fates, introduced by Shakespeare into *Macbeth*.

A writer in the *Atlantic Monthly* for April, 1930, describes a class of school-children as a 'sea of faces'. The phrase 'sea of upturned faces' perhaps owes its American vogue to a speech delivered by Daniel Webster in 1842. It is one of the clichés pilloried by Mr. Cabell in his *Something about Eve*.¹ But, if we turn to *Rob Roy*, we find a Presbyterian congregation described as a 'sea of upturned faces which bent their eyes on the pulpit as a common centre'. The figure is so natural that it may not necessarily be of Scott's invention, but at any rate his is the earliest record.

¹ See p. 104.

CHAPTER v

PROVERBS

A PROVERB, says the Oxford Dictionary, is 'a short pithy saying in common and recognized use; a concise sentence, often metaphorical or alliterative in form, which is held to express some truth ascertained by experience or observation and familiar to all; an adage, a wise saw'. This definition has the fullness and clarity which we invariably find in the Oxford Dictionary, though it might be extended to include rime. 'A cat may look at a king' is both metaphorical and alliterative, but 'There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip' and 'He who goes a-borrowing goes a-sorrowing' are examples of a widely represented type.

Mankind likes to have its wisdom presented in potted form. Every civilized language is rich in proverbs, the same elementary lessons being common to all, 'though expressed', as I have said in the Preface to my Etymological Dictionary, 'in a notation which varies according to national history, tradition, pursuits and characteristics'. Collections of proverbs are among the earliest literary records of ancient races, and explorers find rudimentary examples in the folklore of the least cultivated

tribes. Sometimes the difference between two languages is slight: for example, to 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush' corresponds the German 'Ein sperling in der hand ist besser als zehn auf dem dache'; but French says, 'Un tiens vaut mieux que deux tu l'auras.' The 'bird and bush' saying is also an example of the way in which proverbs gradually settle down from numerous variants into one accepted cast-iron form. Its Greek equivalent is found in Theocritus. The first recorded English example (15th century) is 'A birde in hond is better than thre in the wode', the current form not being established till 1581. The difference between Aristotle's 'One swallow does not make a spring' and the English form of the proverb is obviously one of climate.

The fascination which this mode of teaching has for mankind is shown by the number of synonyms, or approximate synonyms, for *proverb* which the language possesses. I doubt whether any other form of verbal composition has anything like the same number of names. The Anglo-Saxons, following their usual practice, rendered the Latin *proverbium* by the native compound *biword*, still surviving as *byword*, with a sense which preserves what is one of the most characteristic features of the proverb—namely, its condemnatory, minatory, cautionary character. The great majority of proverbs are less concerned with 'do' than with 'don't'. As a rule they tend to inculcate that somewhat puritanical self-righteous kind of philosophy which the more epicurean philosopher derides. Lamb dissects

several of them in his Popular Fallacies. Sharing Voltaire's opinion of 'le superflu, chose très nécessaire', he makes short work of 'Enough is as good as a feast': 'Not a man, woman or child, in ten miles round Guildhall, who really believes this saying. The inventor of it did not believe it himself. It was made in revenge by somebody who was disappointed of a regale. It is a vile cold-scrag-of-mutton sophism, a lie palmed upon the palate, which knows better things.'

The first record of the word *proverb* in the Oxford Dictionary is from Robert of Brunne (1303) and refers to the Proverbs of Solomon. As early as Wyclif we find the reproachful element in the word, the implication that a proverb is the record of a disaster: 'Israel shal be into prouerbe and into fable, to alle puplis' (1 Kings ix. 7), where Coverdale has 'a byworde and fabell' and the Authorized Version 'a proverb and a byword'. This use of *fable*, with which compare French 'Être la fable [*or la fable et la risée*] du monde', is naturally linked with that of *proverb* and *byword*, for the most dramatic proverbs are really condensed fables, or short lessons expressed by metaphor, hardly to be distinguished from the parable and the allegory. 'Don't count your chickens before they're hatched' is an obvious example, from the fable of the optimistic market woman. It has often been pointed out that many proverbs have opposites: for example, 'Look before you leap' is contradicted by 'Nothing venture, nothing have'; 'Look after the pence and the pounds will look after themselves'

by 'Penny wise and pound foolish'. It would seem that the optimist and the pessimist have struggled for the mastery, but, on the whole, the moral is 'Safety first'.

The other native name for proverb is *saw*, literally 'saying' (cognate with the Norse *saga*). It is used in the title of a Middle English collection of about the middle of the 13th century, called the Proverbs of King Alfred. We still speak of an 'old saw' and, after Shakespeare, of 'wise saws and modern instances' (As You Like It, ii. 7). The 16th century eagerly adopted the Latin *adage*, though Shakespeare uses it only twice and *proverb* about twenty times. The popularity of the word was no doubt due to the Adagia of Erasmus, with examples from Latin, Greek and Hebrew. This work was first published in 1500 and much of the author's life was spent in revising and enlarging it, a curious testimony to the attraction which this form of literature had for the greatest minds of the age. To Erasmus also is probably due the adoption by French and English of the almost synonymous *apophthegm*. *Aphorism*, introduced at about the same date, was originally the statement of some physical law, as in the Aphorisms of Hippocrates. It would be possible, but profitless, to try to distinguish by definition these various labels for what the latest writer on the subject calls 'a crystallized summary of popular wisdom or fancy'.

Proverbial expressions may be roughly divided into two classes, the sententious quotation and the traditional metaphor. When we say that 'Pro-

crastination is the thief of time' we are simply quoting, from Young's Night Thoughts, a line which, by its natural effectiveness, has become a received maxim. 'Coming events cast their shadows before' is from Campbell's Lochiel's Warning. This type is somewhat rare, generally traceable to its origin, and sometimes to be attributed, so far as evidence goes, to a comparatively obscure writer. It is naturally not possible to say how far the author has altered or remodelled a proverb already current. The fact that 'circumstances alter cases' must have occurred to many people before its formal statement by Judge Haliburton ('Sam Slick'). 'Imitation is the sincerest [form] of flattery' is one of the (apparently original) aphorisms in C. C. Colton's Lacon (1820). 'It's a long lane that has no turning', from Foote's Trip to Calais (1776), is a variation on 'It's a long run that never turns' (1670). 'Discretion is the better part of valour' is Shakespeare misquoted (1 Henry IV, v. 4). 'Every bullet has its billet' was, according to John Wesley, William III's version of a belief expressed by Gascoigne (1575) in the words 'Every bullet hath a lighting place'. 'None but the brave deserves the fair' is from Dryden's Alexander's Feast, but long before Dryden's time Old French said, 'Jamais couard n'eut belle amie.'

Abraham Lincoln is credited with saying, 'It is not best to swap horses while crossing the river.' 'Handsome is that handsome does' owes its wording to Goldsmith (Vicar of Wakefield, ch. 1), the earliest of the older variants being 'Goodly is he

that goodly dooth' (1580). In 'Hell is paved with good intentions' Dr. Johnson stereotyped a saying familiar to the 16th century. 'God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb' is Sterne's rendering of the familiar French proverb, 'À brebis tondue, Dieu mesure le vent', which George Herbert (1640) had translated, 'To a close-shorn sheep God gives wind by measure.' John Howard Payne's famous song (1823) fixed for ever, in the words 'Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home', a proverb already found in Heywood (1546). In the quite mendacious 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder', the 19th-century song-writer, Thomas Haynes Bayly, attempted to refute the prehistoric truth, 'Out of sight, out of mind'. 'Every cloud has a silver lining' is a mystery. It has certainly been familiar orally to three or four generations, but apparently first attained print in Gilbert's *Mikado*! It is obviously inspired by Milton:

Was I deceived, or did a sable cloud
Turn forth her silver lining on the night?
(*Comus*, ll. 221-222),

lines which were familiar to Mr. Harold Skimpole (Bleak House, ch. 18). 'Accidents will happen' is recorded from the 18th century, but Mr. Micawber is responsible for the addition 'in the best regulated families' (David Copperfield, ch. 38).

The true proverb is a condensed allegory. Though it may have literary record as far back as the Greeks, and may even be traceable in Hebrew and Sanskrit, it is rather the spontaneous product of human

experience than the expression of the meditations of any individual sage. In its final form it is, in the words of Lord John Russell, 'the wit of one man, the wisdom of many'. 'Beauty is only skin-deep' (though, as the American humorist says, that is deep enough for most of us), recorded for 1606, does not seem to me one of the true breed. Nor does 'Spare the rod and spoil the child', though it is found in Greek and Hebrew. These are moral maxims after the manner of Solomon, shallow and literal, while the true proverb should suggest a little drama and express its meaning by metaphor.

There is, in fact, a whole series of gradations between the natural proverb and the copy-book maxim. An example of the latter is 'Knowledge is power', apparently first formulated, in Latin, by Bacon. The morals of familiar fables have often become proverbial, but the perfect proverb should itself be the recognizable germ of a possible fable, susceptible of many variants; above all it should call up a picture. Examples of the perfect type are 'A rolling stone gathers no moss', 'All is not gold that glitters', 'Still waters run deep', 'It's an ill bird that fouls its own nest', 'The proof of the pudding is in the eating', in our use of which we are commonly thinking of things altogether remote from stones, gold, water, birds and pudding. These are expressions of homespun wisdom suggested by naïve observation of the external world and current among the common people for centuries before being reduced to writing.

Ovid wrote 'Exitus acta probat' (Heroides, ii. 85), and in a Middle English romance of Alexander we read :

Hit is y-writein, every thyng
Himseolf shewith in tastyng.

The transformation by a later age to 'The proof of the pudding is in the eating' is the result of communal conviction, not of individual selection. It is the conversion of the abstract into the concrete, the expression of the general by the particular, the reduction of 'everything' to 'pudding'.

Finally, the proverb may be said to have completely established itself when an allusion to it is readily understood without explanation, as when we call a man a 'rolling stone', a 'willing horse', a 'dog in the manger', a 'creaking gate', a 'new broom', or a 'beggar on horseback', or speak of 'crying wolf', 'paying the piper', 'edged tools', the 'last straw', or a 'stitch in time'. It would seem also that any saying, however modern, has a right to be called a proverb, when it is constantly quoted or parodied. Mr. Bumble's expressed opinion that 'the law is a ass' is of curiously wide application. Tennyson's 'Kind hearts are more than coronets' has recently inspired Mr. Guedalla to head an article on an inquest, 'Kind hearts are more than coroners'. Mr. Guedalla is, of course, the great master in this field. The most recent of accepted maxims suggests to him the reflection that, in matters of business, 'Gentlemen prefer Monds', but his finest effort seems to me his description of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald 'twanging his heart-

strings' in his *Sentimental Journey* through the United States and Canada (October, 1929).

It would be interesting to trace the use made of our proverbs by Chaucer. So far as I have noticed, he quotes with some frequency sayings which were evidently in popular use, but his version often varies considerably from that now current. 'Mordre wol out' (B. 1766) differs from the modern version only in spelling. 'Hit is not al gold that glareth' (House of Fame, i. 272) uses a verb in a sense now obsolete. The gist of 'Wonder last but nine night nevere in toun' (Troilus and Cressida, iv. 588) is contained in our 'nine days' wonder'. The proverb about 'glass houses' and 'stones' is first booked by George Herbert (1640). Chaucer's early equivalent is clumsier:

. . . Who that hath an heed of verre,
Fro cast of stones war him in the werre!
(Troilus and Cressida, ii. 867.)

'Till May is out, ne'er cast a clout' appears to be comparatively modern, the earliest record being 1732, but worded rather differently. The sense is, however, in Chaucer:

After greet heet cometh colde;
No man caste his pilche [cloak] away!

These lines come from one of Chaucer's two deliberate attempts at proverb writing. The other, with its

Whoso mochel wol embrace
Litel thereof he shal distreyne,

is equivalent to the French 'Qui trop embrasse mal étreint' or our 'Grasp all, lose all', a favourite

maxim of which a variant is found as early as Layamon (c. 1205) :

For the mon is muchel sot [foolish]
The nimeth [taketh] to him seolven
Mare thonne he mayen walden [can manage].

More easily recognizable is—

Therefore bihoveth him a ful long spoon
That shal ete with a feend. (Chaucer, F. 602.)

Enough of Chaucer, though I have only scratched the surface. Shakespeare often refers to proverbs, and is apparently the 'only begetter' of several, for example: 'Conscience does make cowards of us all' (Hamlet, iii. 1), 'Brevity is the soul of wit' (Hamlet, ii. 2), or the usually misquoted 'The better part of valour is discretion' (1 Henry IV, v. 4). He is also our earliest authority for 'Give the devil his due', though, as the context shows, it was already in use: 'Sir John stands to his word, the devil shall have his bargain; for he was never a breaker of proverbs. He will give the devil his due' (1 Henry IV, i. 2). He uses *adage* twice only: in 3 Henry VI, i. 4, in reference to the familiar 'beggar on horseback', while the other example is the 'poor cat i' the adage' of Macbeth, i. 7, 'letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would"', an allusion to the very ancient saying of the cat that would eat fish, but would not wet her feet, which, if not obsolete, is at any rate unfamiliar to a modern ear.

An immense number of proverbs at one time in common use are quite certainly and definitely dead.

A good example is 'The parrot must have an almond' (Skelton); compare with this 'The parrot will not do more for an almond than he for a commodious drab' (Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, v. 2). It is not found after the 17th century. Another is 'Cat will after kind', which occurs in the *Proverbs of Alfred*, 'For ofte museth [mouseth] the kat after hire moder'. It is used by Touchstone as a rime to Rosalind (*As You Like It*, iii. 2), but is not recorded after the 18th century.

In others one of the essential words has changed. Chaucer has 'I wot best wher wringeth me my sho' (E. 1553) and 'wring' prevails up to Dryden, the substitution of 'pinch' first appearing in Urquhart's *Rabelais* (1653). 'Spilt milk' as a symbol of the irreparable was 'shed milk' until the 18th century. A curious transformation is seen in the metaphor to 'bury the hatchet'. From about 1300 a cessation of hostilities was described as 'hanging up the hatchet'. It was not till the end of the 18th century that acquaintance with the Red Indian rite of 'burying the tomahawk' resulted in a blend of the two expressions.

Sometimes an old proverb is completely superseded. Langland, Chaucer and Caxton refer to the 'beguiler' being 'beguiled', and *Wily Beguiled* is the title of an old play dating from 1606; but by the end of the 17th century 'the biter bit' had become the recognized form.

There is a great deal of literature on proverbs, from the so-called *Proverbs of Alfred* down to the present day. Of the earlier collections those of

Heywood (1546) and Ray (1670) are the best known, the former probably inspired by the *Adagia* of Erasmus, Englished by Taverner in 1539. Heywood is the dullest of hacks. Nothing could be more depressing than the wretched doggerel in which he strings his proverbs together, the occasion for this outpouring being a query from a young friend contemplating matrimony and hesitating between a rich widow and a penniless maid. He seems, however, to have dragged in almost every well-established proverb in the language, along with many that are now quite unfamiliar and were perhaps never really current. In collections of this kind, the compiler is tempted to regard as a proverb anything of the nature of a comparison or allusion; for example, such expressions as 'The fat is in the fire', 'At my fingers' ends', 'A sleeveless errand', 'A day after the fair', 'To sit upon thorns', and dozens more included by Heywood are rather figures of speech than proverbs. He also gives us some similes of the 'drunk as a lord' type.

Ray follows the same practice, classifying his sayings in a rather irritating way under subjects—'county sayings' (these mostly from Fuller's *Worthies*), 'joculatory proverbs', 'proverbs that are intire sentences', 'proverbial phrases and forms of speech that are not intire sentences', and so on. He includes even more dirty sayings than Heywood, but, being a scholar and a gentleman, he apologizes for them: 'The useful notions which many ill-worded proverbs do impart may, I think, compensate us for their homely terms; though I could

wish the contrivers of them had put their sense into more decent and cleanly language.' He also gives the foreign equivalents or supposed foreign originals of many sayings, his 'French' (or that of his proof-reader) being of the type made familiar to us by our contemporary best-sellers. A large proportion of the sayings he books were certainly never in popular use. He makes many edifying comments: in the section on 'Proverbial Similies' (*sic*) we find 'As drunk as a beggar', with the remark, 'This proverb begins now to be disused, and instead of it people are ready to say, As drunk as a lord; so much hath that vice (the more is the pity) prevailed among the nobility and gentry of late years.' Or again, 'As false as a Scot'—'I hope that nation generally deserves not such an imputation; and could wish that we Englishmen were less partial to ourselves and censorious of our neighbours.' The edition here quoted is the third.

The most recent collection, and one that will supersede all others, is Mr. G. L. Apperson's *English Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases* (Dent, London, 1929). The compiler has embodied all that is worth salving from his predecessors, but his work, taken as a whole, is compiled from original sources—from the reading and re-reading for many years of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Scott, the publications of the Early English Text Society and other societies which print early documents, and, in fact, of all that part of English literature which may be called racy of the soil. I do not, however, notice any references to Hakluyt, Purchas or Captain John

Smith, where he would, I am convinced, have found earlier records of some nautical sayings, such as 'Ship-shape and Bristol fashion', for which his earliest authority is Scott. Only after reducing his vast material to order has he supplemented it by occasional quotations from the Oxford Dictionary. Each proverb is carefully documented, with exactly dated references for its variations and use from the earliest recorded occurrence down to the present day. The order is the rational alphabetical, the place of each proverb being determined by its keyword, while cross-references are copious and helpful. Occasionally a Greek or Latin original is quoted, but considerations of space have prevented him from following Ray's example of giving Continental equivalents.

It seems pretty evident that a certain number of proverbs booked fairly late are simple translations from French; for instance, 'The game is not worth the candle' looks like a literal rendering of the much earlier 'Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle'; 'He laughs best that laughs last' is first found in Vanbrugh (1706) and is referred to by Scott (Peveril of the Peak, ch. xxxviii) as a French proverb ('Rira bien qui rira le dernier'). For 'A burnt child dreads the fire' the 17th century sometimes said, 'The scalded cat fears cold water', closely translated from 'Chat échaudé craint l'eau froide'. Other languages have made hardly any contribution. In Shelton's translation of Don Quixote (1612-20) are many sayings translated from Spanish, perhaps the most sententious of European languages. Some of

these had a sort of literary currency for a century, but were probably never received into popular speech.

A curious phenomenon is the very late appearance of many saws which have all the atmosphere of extreme antiquity. The actual documentary record of these elements of language is, of course, largely a matter of accident, and investigators are occasionally unlucky in missing useful sources. 'A bull in a china-shop' is first booked in Smedley's *Frank Fairlegh* (1850), 'Right as rain' for 1894 (I remember it in use long before), and 'Two is company, three is none' for 1871. The 'thin end of the wedge', which one would be inclined to attribute conjecturally to Archimedes, appears from the *Oxford Dictionary* to be no older than the 19th century. 'Nothing succeeds like success' is attributed to Sir Stafford Northcote, afterwards Lord Iddesleigh (+ 1887), the colleague of Beaconsfield. In my *Etymological Dictionary* I have given it, on the strength of an *Oxford Dictionary* quotation for 1868, to Sir Arthur Helps. 'To wash one's dirty linen in public' is a modern metaphor for a practice lately reprobated by an Irish journalist in the eloquent words, 'This washing of dirty linen by those who govern only tends to undermine the Ship of State in a country which has so lately passed through the fires of sedition.'

A special section of the subject is furnished by the vast amount of proverbial lore associated with names of counties, towns and villages, and usually reflecting local patriotism or prejudice. The col-

lections of Fuller and Ray are very rich in these sayings, now usually inexplicable, such as the Essex saying, 'Braintree for the pure, Barking for the poor, Coggeshall for the jeering town, Kelvedon for the lady of easy virtue', quoted by Ray. Sometimes a stupid pun is intended; for example, to 'go to Bedfordshire'—that is, to bed—is recorded about 1600. The disobedient were warned that they would be 'sent to Birchin Lane' (in the City of London) and would 'come home by Weeping Cross' (a hamlet in Staffordshire), and the improvident were told that they were 'on the highway to Needham' (in Norfolk). Equally dull and obscure are the allusions to numerous unknown people whose memory is perpetuated in 'As drunk as David's sow', 'As queer as Dick's hatband, that went nine times round and would not meet at last', or 'As Clayton clawed the pudding, when he ate bag and all'. Sometimes in these phrases also an elementary pun can be detected, e.g. to 'send by John Long the carrier' is to send by a slow and circuitous route.

Mr. Apperson's Dictionary of Proverbs should be in every academic library and on the shelves of everyone who is interested in the history of the language. One may perhaps regret that the compiler has not supplied more explanations, such as the tennis origin of 'From pillar to post' or the fantastic transformation involved in 'To take heart of grace'.¹ Perhaps his abstention is the result of

¹ Here 'heart of grace' is for the original 'hart of grease', a hunter's term for a fat stag.

nausea evoked by the 'anecdotic' explanations to be found in Brewer and other early compilers and repeated without examination by later copyists; for this kind of compilation has often been carried out by the unqualified and has resulted in what can only be called impudent bookmaking.

I have before me a volume called a Desk-book of Idioms and Idiomatic Phrases, from which I learn, *inter alia*, that 'jimber the kibber' is 'the fastening of a lantern to a horse's neck and checking one of its legs so as to make the light swing as a ship's light, a practice of wreckers to allure ships to shore', and that "'haeremai", literally "Come hither", is a phrase of welcome adopted in New Zealand from the speech of the aborigines'. Along with such familiar English idioms as the above we find the elucidation of more obscure problems—for example, that a 'fly' is 'a two-winged dipterous [does that make four wings?] insect common in dwelling-houses', that a 'silly ass' is 'a person given to idiotic blundering', and that "'Glad to see you back" is said on a return from a journey or voyage'. After this we are very grateful to learn that 'anon.' is an abbreviation of 'anonymous', and is not to be mistaken for a man's name; also that a 'husband' is 'one who is house-bound', and that the Middle English 'Heo is ful itowen' means 'He is full of strife', and not, as philologists have hitherto supposed, 'She is ill-educated'. I must apologize for quoting all this foolery, but the accident of the two books reaching me together made a comparison inevitable.

The phrase-maker still flourishes and contributes periodically to the language. 'Acid test' and 'The world must be made safe for democracy' are both recent additions.¹ The comic song and the comic paper sometimes throw off lucky phrases that may almost be called proverbial, such as the 'only pebble on the beach' or the 'curate's egg'; but it does not seem likely that we shall ever coin new proverbs. 'A man's liver is his carburettor' is suggested by a contemporary writer as the kind of maxim which might replace the old, useless proverbs, but the suggestion seems to lack conviction. True proverbs, as distinguished from sententious phrases, belong to the direct observation and simple life of a primitive age. Not only do we fail to increase the supply, but we allow the original store to fall out of use. 'Who sups with the devil must have a long spoon', of which I have quoted Chaucer's version (p. 94), would have needed no explanation a generation ago. In fact, its use by Joseph Chamberlain once gave grave offence to a foreign power. The other day I tried it, first on a gathering of exceptionally clever young women, none of whom had ever heard it, and then on a gathering of learned philologists, some of whom were in the same sad case.

It is true that nothing can be more exasperating than the constant recurrence of proverbial clichés, though one can endure with patience the slow speech of the old-fashioned rustic, with his regular parenthesis, 'As the saying is'. Yet it remains

¹ Both made current by the late President Woodrow Wilson.

true that this pithy lore, which belongs to the very kernel of the language, saturates the literary texture of the giants most deeply rooted in their native soil — Chaucer, Shakespeare, Scott. Shakespeare, especially, not only absorbed the sententious wisdom of the ages, but gave it forth again in a contribution to English phraseology so tremendous that no one has ever dared to try and measure it. Contemporary literature shuns such allusions. We may except Mr. Bernard Shaw, but he is no longer young, and, moreover, is one of the half-dozen or so writers who still carry on the great tradition of good English. I have recently had the curiosity to read, from this point of view, a quite modern novel by a quite modern young lady, the type of book described in the flowery ‘blurbiage’ of the publisher as ‘written with a daring and frankness that might shock a reader not cognizant of its high and pure purpose’, and from cover to cover I only detected one fragment of proverbial lore, a solitary allusion to the ‘last straw’.

The same kind of anæmia (in spite of the fashionable and frequent ‘bloody’) afflicts our spoken language. The speech of the old, especially the country-bred, is still full of meat, but that of the young townsman is a very thin brew, with a kind of cheap cinema slang as its chief ingredient. Lord Chesterfield, who was of opinion that a ‘national proverb was not becoming to the conversation of a man of breeding’, may sleep peacefully in his grave. It is true that, in his day, the use of conversational clichés seems to have been almost a

mania. Swift derided the practice in his *Polite Conversation* (1738). A comparison between his malignant cleverness and Heywood's dreary monotony is a comparison between the genius and the hack. Mr. James Branch Cabell would appear to like popular truisms as little as the Dean :

She now spoke of more and yet more evil matters such as were very well adapted to incite Gerald to brutality. She spoke of the battle of life, and of the feast of reason, and of the irony of fate, and of the lap of luxury. She talked of the writing on the wall, and of the scroll of fame, and of the lexicon of youth, and of the cloud that had a silver lining. She touched upon the two seas, of troubles, and of upturned faces. She discussed the durance that was vile, and the hours that were wee and sma', and the consummation that was devoutly to be wished for, and the light that was dim and religious, and the heat which was not humidity. She indicated the balm in Gilead, the place in the sun, and the safety in numbers. She afterwards gave succinctly the recipes for making a mountain out of a molehill, a silk purse out of a sow's ear, and a virtue out of a necessity. For no evil phrase of any sort was hidden from the wisdom of Evaine (Something about Eve).

CHAPTER VI

PROPER NAMES AND COMMON NOUNS

IN the autumn of 1932 I published a little book called *Words and Names*, dealing with the incessant additions made to language by the gradual passage of the proper name into the common noun class. The scrappiness of the book, apologized for in the preface, was due to the bewildering amount of material and the impossibility of making a logical selection which would fit into a small framework. Moreover, as far as our own language is concerned, the vast field of research connected with this phenomenon has remained practically unexplored territory, except for the scattered guesses made by the early etymologists, a few utterly unscientific works that have appeared since Trench popularized wordlore in the middle of the 19th century, and the imbecile theories that the amateur philologist contributes to the press whenever *Tommy Atkins* or *Nosey Parker*, *pumpnickel* or *Welsh rabbit*, has become a matter of transient interest. Here, as in most regions of philology, we lag hopelessly behind other European countries. This element in various continental languages has been handled in innumerable monographs and dissertations, which can serve as material for comprehensive works on the subject.

Even the Oxford Dictionary has largely neglected this aspect of the language.¹ Perhaps deliberately, for, especially in the region of slang, names figuratively used have for a few years a currency dependent on the events of the day and then disappear from the language. It would perhaps be more correct to say that they disappear from print, for many such words survive in humble colloquial speech long after they have ceased to be literary, e.g. the Oxford Dictionary does not record *clarence*, a four-wheel cab (named in compliment to the Duke of Clarence, afterwards William IV) after 1864, but the word was used by an aged cabby, giving evidence in a police-court, as recently as 1914. His must have been almost the last London growler. Some such words escape the Dictionary altogether. An example is *coburg loaf*, familiar to me since childhood and still familiar to the baker, which was named soon after the marriage of Queen Victoria to Prince Albert of Coburg-Gotha. It is not in the Oxford Dictionary, original or concise.²

The old slang dictionaries, such as Grose and Hotten, are full of figuratively used proper names which must have had a general, though brief, currency. In Hotten we find *kennedy*, 'to strike or kill with a poker, a St. Giles's term so given from a man of that name being killed by a poker', and *mandozy*, 'a term of endearment; probably named

¹ This neglect is partly atoned for in the Supplement (see p. 60), in which many of the words mentioned in this chapter will now be found.

² Nor in the Supplement.

from the valiant fighter', i.e. the famous Jewish pugilist, Joseph Mendoza (1764-1836). Neither of these is in the Oxford Dictionary, which registers, however, from 1803 onward, the obsolete *mendoza*, 'one of the wheels of a spinning mule', with the queried etymology 'from the (Spanish) name of the inventor'. Experience of the way in which such names are given would rather suggest some jocular association with the above-mentioned pugilist, who must have been at the height of his career about the time of the invention. According to Östberg¹, *mendozy* was also used of a telling hit. *Oliver*, thieves' cant for the moon, is not in the Oxford Dictionary. As the first highwaymen were broken Cavaliers, it seems legitimate to conjecture an allusion to the broad, red face of the great Protector. The only *oliver* recorded by the Dictionary is the name of the primitive treadle-hammer of the Staffordshire nail-makers, formerly used also by smiths. This is a good example of the research that needs to be done in preparation for the great national dictionary of the 21st century. The first Dictionary record of the word is for 1846, though the implement was described in 1686 by Plot, the antiquary, who mentions the holly-wood springs which work it. This, with a late variant *holliper*, makes the Dictionary hesitate between a derivative of *holly* and the proper name Oliver. But the Engineer for October 23, 1931, prints a long and learned article by Mr. Rhys Jenkins with Anglo-

¹ Personal Names in Appellative Use in English (Uppsala, 1905).

French quotations for *oliver* in connection with Yorkshire 'bloomeries' of the 14th century. This does not settle the origin of the word, but it takes its history back five centuries and shows the form *holliper* to be a product of folk-etymology. May one conjecture a playful allusion to the hammer-strokes of the paladin?

Anyone who dabbles in this department of wordlore cannot help noticing the popular instinctive conversion of an unfamiliar word into something that looks like a name.¹ Several dictionaries of costume, from Planché² onward, register *mandeville*, a kind of cloak, an assimilation to a well-known surname of the earlier *mantevil*, an unexplained derivative of *mantle*. In Devonshire a young eel, properly *elver* (i.e. *eel-fare*), is sometimes called an *oliver*. In Galloway a *pheasant* is an *Ephesian*, which is evidently a misunderstanding of the older *fesan*, French *faisan*. *Bertram*, an obsolescent name for the *pyrethrum*, represents a German corruption of the Greco-Latin name. In many English counties, before the devastating Elementary Education Act of 1870, a *fairy* was a *Pharisee*. The 18th century used *busby* for a large, bushy wig, the name being later applied (c. 1800), perhaps jestingly, to the fur head-dress of the hussars. Apparently the later *buzz* or *buzz-wig* is identical and the still later *fuzz-wig*, a riming variant, the

¹ Or even into a phrase containing a name. With the American *whip-poor-will*, suggested by the bird's cry, cf. the less familiar *whip-tom-kelly*, of similar origin.

² History of British Costumes (1834), by J. R. Planché, Somerset Herald.

two being combined in the name of Dickens's Serjeant *Buzfuz*. But there is no clue to the original *busby*, for the legend that the famous Dr. Busby, who ruled Westminster School from 1640 to 1695, habitually wore the head-dress later adopted by the hussars, seems academically improbable; nor does it account for the earlier wig sense. Whatever be the origin of the word, it has obviously been assimilated to a familiar surname.

It is natural that changing fashions in wigs and hats should have made important contributions to this rather transitory vocabulary. Marlborough's victory at Ramillies (1706) was responsible for the *ramilie* wig worn by Uncle Toby, as well as for a particular cock of the hat. Some twenty years earlier the French victory at Steenkerke, in Belgium, gave its name to a number of fashions and especially to the famous *steinkirk* cravat, the flowing character of which, according to Voltaire, imitated the disorderly attire of the French household troops going hastily into action. The degree of 'cock' which the hat should receive seems to have been rather a vital matter. Planché (v.s.) quotes, from the London Chronicle of 1762, 'Hats are now worn, on an average, six inches and three-fifths broad in the brim and cocked between Quaker and Kevenhuller'; from which we may infer that the *Kevenhuller cock*, from the Austrian general Khevanhüller (+ 1744), was rather *outré*, since Quakers, presumably, do not cock their hats. Reverting to wigs, we find the *Brutus* fashionable in the early 19th century. This is said to imitate

the rough head of hair affected by French revolutionaries whose ideal was the incorruptible Roman. The Oxford Dictionary has no record after 1857, but my mother used to apply the name to the cockatoo type of hair-dressing exemplified in portraits of His Majesty King George IV. The fashion of wearing one's own hair in a kind of knot or 'bun' was called in the 18th century after Earl Cadogan (+ 1726), Marlborough's quartermaster-general. Curiously enough, the word is found much more frequently in French, in which language it is usually spelt *catogan*. This, however, is not an uncommon phenomenon. Tapestry is not called *arras* in French, though Italian has *arazzo*, nor has French any knowledge of our *mazarine*, dark blue, or of the same word in the obsolete sense of a small metal dish, both perhaps connected with Cardinal Mazarin (+ 1662), or, more probably, with the Duchesse de Mazarin, who died at Chelsea in 1699.

Stories of the *busby* type are to be found, not only in the imaginations of the early etymologists but even in the works of modern scholars with the Oxford Dictionary at their disposition. A book published in Sweden in 1905,¹ which contains much solid and valuable information, resurrects the fantastic etymologies once accepted for the two mysterious words, *dun*, to demand payment, and *bull*, an incongruous or self-contradictory statement (not originally associated with Ireland). *Dun* is first recorded in Bacon, who quotes a 'plain old man at

¹ Östberg (v.s.).

Buxton who sold besoms' and *bull* is of about the same date. The 18th century apparently invented 'Joe Dun, a famous bailiff of the town of Lincoln', and 'Obadiah Bull, a blundering lawyer of London, who lived in the reign of Henry VII' (Grose, Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue, 1796). The same Swedish author identifies *Merry Andrew*, where *Andrew* is simply the stock name for the travelling quack's servant, with Andrew Borde, physician and traveller, who died in 1649, and actually connects the vulgar *twist*, appetite, with that historic occasion when Oliver 'asked for more'. The verb *twist*, to eat gluttonously, is found in the 17th century and is used by Urquhart in his translation of Rabelais. Östberg explains *MacDougallism* as an 'undue display of modesty and delicacy imputed to the inhabitants of Scotland'. This obsolete nonce-word no doubt alluded, not to the inherent modesty of the Scot, but to the determined attempt of a Mr. MacDougall, of the London County Council, to clean up the London music-halls c. 1890. We may compare *Comstockery*,¹ exaggerated prudishness, a word which I have come across in American books. It dates from the Comstock Postal Act of 1873, which gave authority to a busybody of that name to exercise a censorship over all postal matter in the United States. So inquisitorial was his pursuit of innocent words that might be suspected of some hidden moral turpitude that Mr. Mencken describes his regime as a 'Reign of Terror'. Comstock was president of the Society for the Sup-

¹ See p. 61.

pression of Vice, which, in one of Theodore Dreiser's novels, detected 'seventy-five lewd and seventeen profane passages'. *Grahamize*, which the Oxford Dictionary records as recently as 1892, is an allusion to the opening of Mazzini's letters in 1844, when Sir James Graham was Home Secretary. Some of these names illustrate the survival of the unimportant. Little did Edward *Lloyd*, who kept a coffee-house in Lombard Street *c.* 1700, imagine that his name would once be known wherever ships sail the sea, or that his neighbour Christopher Cat (*Kit-Cat*), the pieman, was also marked for immortality. In the South African Diamond Fields a terminological inexactitude is still called a *Gregory*, from the name of a mineralogical expert who decided that there were no diamonds in the country.

When we come to what seems the arbitrary application of familiar baptismal names in a transferred sense, etymological curiosity must usually remain unsatisfied. Occasionally a pun¹ can be detected, e.g. *Thomas*, used by Rabelais of the human stomach, is evidently a play on *estomac*; but, when we do anything like *billy-o*, we are imitating a model whose identity is lost in the mists of antiquity. In spite of the doubts expressed by the Oxford Dictionary, I have little doubt that the Scottish *billie*, chum, fellow, brother, repeatedly used by Scott, is identical with the Shakespearean

¹ Or a misunderstanding. American colonists of the 18th century converted the Indian bird-name *wiskatjan* into *whisky-john*, which, by the play of popular fancy, at once became *whisky-jack*.

bully, and comes, via Dutch, from the German *buhle*, defined by Ludwig (1716) as 'an amorist, a paramour, a lover, a wooer, a gallant, a spark'; but there are innumerable mysterious *billies*, e.g. the Oxford Dictionary explains the word as a slubbing machine, a highwayman's club, the Australian bushman's tea-can; also *billy-biter*, the blue titmouse, *billy-button*, applied to various field-flowers, *billy-wix*, the tawny owl, etc., to which might be added many more such applications from the English Dialect Dictionary, along with *billy*, a silk pocket-handkerchief, *billy*, a policeman's staff, *billy*, stolen metal, *billy-fencer*, a marine store-dealer, from Hotten's Slang Dictionary; and, to pursue the same name a little further, whence come the American *willies* and what is their relation to our native *jim-jams*? The obsolescent *charley*, a patch of beard worn on the lower lip, may have been suggested by portraits of Charles I, just as a pointed beard is called in French a *Henri-Quatre*; but the corresponding female *charlotte*, applied to various sweet dishes, remains as mysterious as that *julienne* whose name is borne by a plain and wholesome soup, or of that *Maria* to whom we owe a famous vehicle.

Such applications of the more familiar baptismal names are literally innumerable. A witness in a police-court case recently stated that the prisoner, whom he did not know, said, 'Give me a hand with this case, George.' 'Is your name George?' asked the magistrate. 'No, sir; but everyone is George to these men.' It seems a reasonable con-

jecture that the *hi-jacker* derives his name from the summons 'Hi, Jack!' with which he brings the startled bootlegger to a halt. Similarly an unduly inquisitive individual is often described as a *peeping Tom*, his prototype being traditionally associated with the story of Lady Godiva, though an Anglo-Saxon *Tom* would be a philological curiosity. This tendency to personify by the use of a familiar name is due to the same psychology which describes the social ambitions of the suburbs as 'keeping up with the Joneses'. Quite lately I was surprised to hear *all Sir Garnet* used in the sense of O.K. This allusion to the efficiency of a famous English general¹ is archaic, but intelligible, but probably no one will ever know why the senior service uses *Tom Collins* in a similar sense. It is to be hoped that some day an energetic young philologist will produce a massive volume on the figurative senses of the ubiquitous *Jack*, explaining, among other things, why in the speech of the up-to-date gangster *jack* means money, while its doublet *jake* is roughly equivalent to O.K. Probably the latest development of *jack* appears in the compound *flapjack*. This means, according to the Oxford Dictionary, 'a pancake, an apple turnover, a hydraulic machine, and a lapwing'; but according to an English judge, addressing the court on April 7, 1933, the *flapjack* is 'the constant attendant on every lady who travels in an omnibus or a tube train'.

When a less familiar name is employed, it is

¹ Sir Garnet (afterwards Lord) Wolseley (+ 1913).

occasionally possible to trace, or at any rate suggest, the psychological process involved. It is thought, for instance, that the French *guéridon*, a small occasional table or lamp-stand, is identical with Guéridon, a well-known farcical character of the 17th century, sometimes represented holding a candle. French *davier*, dentist's forceps, was, in Cotgrave's time, not only 'the toole wherewith barbers pull out teeth' but also 'a certain instrument to picke a locke withall'. It is also called, in old slang, *le roy David* or *Daviot*. Such an instrument was in medieval thieves' language also a *harpe*, cf. the saying, 'C'est un parent du roi David; il joue de la harpe', i.e. he is a thief, after which the application of the king's name was comparatively simple. With David it seems natural to mention Goliath, who, in the Middle Ages, was transformed into a personification of vice and became a sort of patron saint of the *Goliards* or ribald clerks. Chaucer (Prol. 560) uses *Goliard* in his description of the Miller. Some authorities, including the Oxford Dictionary, prefer to derive this from Latin *gula*, gluttony. Perhaps the two sources have combined, as the choice of names which convey a subsidiary suggestion is very characteristic of this kind of word-creation, e.g. the French slang *putipharder*, to attempt to seduce a blameless Joseph, has apparently been influenced by an ugly French common noun. With the illogical substitution of Potiphar for his wife we may compare the regular journalistic use of *Frankenstein* for a monster beyond its master's control, whereas, in

Mrs. Shelley's story, it is the name of the student who created the monster.

In a recent newspaper (April 12, 1933) I read that a feature of the Easter holidays will be the new *pork-pie toque*. A few of the aged may still remember that young lady of the popular song who wore, about 1860—

A pork-pie hat and feather ;
Knickerbockers for the dirty weather.

The resuscitation of the term reminds one of the obsolete name for a similar, or perhaps rival, head-dress of the same period. Hotten describes *moab* as 'a name applied to the turban-shaped hat fashionable among ladies, and lady-like swells of the other sex, in 1858-59'. The Oxford Dictionary registers the word, with a quotation as late as 1882. The explanation will be found in Psalm lx. The mention of *Moab* suggests a brief digression on a few other mysteries of Biblical geography. *Cappadocia* is only mentioned twice in the Bible and in neither case with any special significance. In Dekker's *Shoemaker's Holiday* (1600) the London apprentices are called *mad Cappadocians*. This may be an elaborately clumsy word-play on *mad-cap*, but it will not explain the use of *Cappadochio*, also *Capperdochy*, for a prison about the same period. Characteristic of youth's attitude towards age is the obsolete *Golgotha*, applied in 18th-century University slang to the elevated pew in which the heads of houses sat at Great St. Mary's, Cambridge ; it was so called, says Charnock, 'because it was the

place of skulls'. The first Oxford Dictionary quotation for consigning to *Jericho*,¹ as an alternative to Bath, is dated as early as 1648. I do not attach much etymological importance to the occasion on which David (2 Sam. x. 5) said to his servants, half-shaved by Hanun, 'Tarry at Jericho until your beards be grown', nor have I any suggestion to offer as to the origin of the phrase; but Parson Woodforde's diary records a sense hitherto unregistered. On April 26, 1780, he was 'busy in painting some boarding in my wall garden which was put up to prevent people in the kitchen seeing those who had occasion to go to Jericho'.

Even our native geography is rich in allusive uses, some fairly obvious, but others somewhat mysterious. I am not thinking of those malevolent rimes and sayings which our ancestors were so fond of composing about the inhabitants of the neighbouring village or town, but of phrases and transferred senses which have passed into everyday speech and literature. 'Ship-shape and Bristol fashion' is a compliment to the great western port from which so many early venturers sailed. That part of Watling Street which runs from London to Dunstable, now the Edgware Road, has been, since Bishop Latimer, symbolical of straightness and plainness. *Dunstable* is common as an 18th-century adjective in the sense of plain, downright, and the word was still familiar to Scott, who, in *Redgauntlet* (ch. xvii), makes Darsie Latimer say to himself, 'If this is not plain speaking, there is no

¹ See p. 55.

such place as downright Dunstable.' The fact that *Billingsgate* has been famous for rhetoric since the 17th century inclines one to ponder on the mysterious affinity that seems to link the retailing of fish with unusual powers of vituperative exposition. The rhetorical gifts both of the English fishwife and the French *harengère* excited comment about the time of Shakespeare. Soon after the foundation of Notes and Queries there was an animated discussion on the origin of *Walsall-legged*, which various correspondents affirmed to be still a familiar description of a bow-legged man in the Midlands :

Sutton for mutton,
 Tamworth for beef,
 Walsall for bandy-legs,
 Brummagem for a thief.

According to the English Dialect Dictionary, playing *Walsall* at whist is equivalent to the more familiar playing *Whitechapel*, i.e. leading from a single card.¹

The connection of words with the geographical names they represent is often, apart from well-authenticated local products, rather puzzling. The revolutionary song and dance called the *carmagnole* was originally the name of a sort of cardigan jacket affected by Republican extremists. Etymologists are agreed in deriving the word from the Italian town of Carmagnola, in Piedmont, but, as far as I know, no logical connection has ever been established. *Tuxedo*, the American name for a dinner-jacket, is not in the Oxford Dictionary. Appar-

¹ Also potting the white at billiards.

ently it is named from Tuxedo (N.Y.), but I have seen no explanation of the association.¹ Even the *Saratoga trunk* is only 'probably' connected by the Oxford Dictionary with Saratoga Springs. The cowboy's *stetson*, which I can discover in no dictionary, is, I am told on good authority, the name of the original maker.² Why is a *dongola race*, i.e. a punt-paddling race, so called? Dongola is on the Nile, a river which was rather in the papers at the time of the first *dongola races* (c. 1890), but what is the connection? And while we are in North Africa, it seems pertinent to inquire why a particularly strong ale, brewed at Levens Hall, in Cumberland, is called *Morocco*. There is inevitably an ancient legend, rather vague geographically, to the effect that the secret recipe was brought to England by a returning crusader. Perhaps from Beer-Sheba? ³ Why is a kind of couch called a *chesterfield*? Is it from the town in Derbyshire or has it the same origin as the *chesterfield* overcoat, which, according to the Oxford Dictionary, takes its name from a 19th-century Earl of Chesterfield. Equally mysterious is the name *canterbury* for a kind of music-stool or whatnot. It is easy to say

¹ According to the Supplement, it was 'named after a fashionable country club at Tuxedo'.

² This is confirmed by the Supplement.

³ The mention of this name reminds me of a true story, which has really no place in this book, but for which the discerning reader will be grateful. A lady touring in Palestine recently remarked to a clergyman in the party, 'Do you know, before I came to the Holy Land, I had no idea that Dan and Beer-Sheba were places. I always thought they were man and wife, like Sodom and Gomorrah.'

'because first made at so-and-so', but I fancy that names of this kind often depend on the taste and fancy of some imaginative tradesman, just as the milliner arbitrarily names her materials *georgette*, *ninon*, etc., or a soft felt hat becomes in America a *fedora*.¹

The obsolescent *antimacassar* reminds us that our grandfathers were wont to anoint their heads with an unguent inimical to furniture. But Macassar oil was really not a natural product of the Philippines. The name appears to have been chosen, as having a romantic Oriental flavour, by its vendor, T. Rowland, whose grandiloquent essay on the Virtues of the Macassar Oil anticipated the most soaring efforts of the modern advertiser and even inspired Byron :

In virtues nothing earthly could surpass her,
Save thine 'incomparable oil', Macassar !
(Don Juan, i. 17.)

The small writing-desk called a *davenport*² is said to be 'probably from the maker's name'. Chippendale we know and Sheraton we know, but who was Davenport? Is it not just as likely to have been named as a compliment to the famous actress, Mary Ann Davenport³ (+ 1843)? This

¹ According to the Supplement, it was named from Sardou's play *Fédora* (1882). This would make it a parallel to *trilby*, from George du Maurier's novel (1894).

² In contemporary American novels the word seems to be used of a couch.

³ A suggestion that there may be a playful allusion to a piece of furniture used by the Davenport brothers in their famous disappearing trick is negatived by the dates.

guess leads to one still bolder. The cooking-range called a *kitchener* made its appearance at the great Exhibition of 1851. It seems to be assumed that it is derived from *kitchen*. But, if one reflects, such a formation is really unparalleled. I am inclined to suspect a connection with Dr. William Kitchiner, the famous English gastronomer of the nineteenth century, author of *Apicius Redivivus* or the *Cook's Oracle*, which ran through many editions and was regarded as authoritative at the time of the Exhibition.

Reverting to geographical names, it is interesting to note the varying fates of what appear almost to be verbal twins. Peking and Nanking, which, I understand, mean north capital and south capital, both gave their names to materials. *Nankeen*, especially as applied to breeches, is a familiar 19th-century word, but, though *pekin* apparently still has currency, few of us, I fancy, are familiar with it. On the other hand, *nankeen* is unknown in French, but *pékin* has become, since Napoleon's time, the soldier's name for what Private Mulvaney calls a 'lousy civilian'. This is said to be from the use of the material in civilian dress. This word gave occasion to one of the best *mots* attributed to Talleyrand, who had asked one of the more ruffianly marshals for information. The soldier explained brusquely, 'Nous appelons pékin tout ce qui n'est pas militaire,' to which Talleyrand sweetly replied, 'Ah ! comme nous appelons militaire tout ce qui n'est pas civil.' Another pair of words of unequal fortunes are *magenta* and *solferino*, names fan-

tastically given to two of the aniline dyes discovered soon after Napoleon III's two defeats of the Austrians in 1859. Now one is taken and the other left.

Other words which, like *pékin*, have taken a second step in sense are *calicot*, from Calicut, which is modern French slang for a draper's assistant, and *surat*, the name of a coarse cotton material, which acquired in Lancashire the general sense of inferior or adulterated. The Times for May 8, 1863, contains the report of a libel action in which a brewery firm obtained damages for having been described as 'surat brewers'. Personal names naturally go through similar phases. We all know the *Vandyke beard* and the verb *vandyke*, to cut with deep angular indentations, but we no longer use *vandyking*, as the early 19th century did, of the zig-zag course of the inebriate. *Hessian boots* were originally worn by German troopers from Hesse. The American *Hessian*, a venal mercenary, is a reminiscence of the British employment of Hessian troops in the American War of Independence. It is unlikely that the *Hessian fly* was 'so named, because it was erroneously supposed to have been carried to America by the Hessian troops' (Oxford Dictionary). Evidently it is a spiteful witticism of the same type as our own famous *Hanover rat*, fabled by Tories to have come over with George I.

I must apologize for the discursive and disconnected nature of these casual notes. Although they have no arrangement, I think a few general conclusions can be drawn. The chief of these is the complete inadequacy, from this point of view, of

existing dictionaries, even of the great Oxford Dictionary. In various compilations of the 18th and 19th centuries I have found scores of words of this type which no dictionary records. This is said, not by way of criticism, but to emphasize the fact that we need, for the history of the language, a special dictionary dealing with this elusive element in our vocabulary. Before such a dictionary can be compiled there must be dozens of preliminary spade-work essays on special aspects of the subject. Anything that has been done so far is amateur guess-work, often useful as evidence of the vogue of a word, but quite valueless as etymology. A little guessing is legitimate, as I have suggested here and there in this paper. It is, for instance, pretty obvious that the name *shadrack*, applied in foundries to a 'mass of iron on which the operation of smelting has failed of its intended effect' (Webster), is an allusion to the immunity enjoyed by a pious young Hebrew in the burning, fiery furnace; but we know nothing of that Monteith whose name is commemorated in an article familiar to bric-à-brac collectors. A *monteith* is a large basin the rim of which is furnished with notches to which goblets can be hung for rinsing. It is, of course, easy to say 'from the name of the inventor', and to quote an old rime:

New things produce new words, and thus Monteith
Has by one vessel saved his soul from death.

But this is hardly more helpful than the information supplied by the first describer of the article, who,

in 1683, tells us that 'such a bason was called a Monteigh from a fantastical Scot called Monsieur Monteigh, who at that time or a little before wore the bottome of his cloake or coate so notched'.

Then we have to note the evanescent character of much of this vocabulary. Even the Ingoldsby Legends, not yet a century old, are full of allusions which are mysterious to the modern reader, e.g., to take a simple example, the *double Joes* mentioned by the author are double-barrelled guns by the famous Joe Manton (+ 1835), whose lethal devices have long been superseded. Some names seem to have been specially favoured. The Oxford Dictionary registers four *spencers*, (1) a kind of wig, 'probably' from Charles Spencer, third Earl of Sunderland (+ 1722), (2) a tailless overcoat, as worn by the second Earl Spencer (+ 1835), (3) a kind of life-belt, from Mr. Knight Spencer (*fl. c.* 1803), (4) a kind of sail, from some Spencer otherwise unknown. The first sense of Spencer reminds me of the already mentioned fact that quite a considerable linguistic monograph might be written on names of wigs and that another might be written on hats. In fact, the subject of this paper is partly the result of a recent conversation with the elderly craftsman who cuts my hair. Speaking of a local worthy of past days, he remarked that the old gentleman always wore a *Müller hat*. At this I pricked up my ears, asked for details, and was told that everybody knows that a *Müller hat* is a flat-topped, hard felt. I do not find it in any work of reference, but I at once associated the name

with the murder, about the middle of the 19th century, on the old North London Railway, of one Mr. Briggs by a young Austrian named Müller, who, with the inevitable stupidity of the criminal, kept his victim's hat and altered it to suit his own fancy, a piece of frugality which led to his detection and conviction. This conjecture is confirmed by the following entry in a book published in 1865—'*Müllerize*, to cut down a hat, after the manner of the late Franz Müller. A term used by some hatters.'

P.S. This paper, as the title indicates, does not touch on verbs of the *boycott*, *shanghai* type, for examples of which see my Words and Names, Chapter VIII. An interesting example of this kind of formation, which does not seem to have survived, is sent to me from the Record Office by Mr. A. C. Wood. In a letter from Brussels, in November, 1620, one William Trumbull writes, 'Wee affirme the Counte of Mansfeld for money should have Stanleyed the towne of Pilsen'. One naturally thinks of the desertion of Richard III by the Stanleys at Bosworth (1485); but, looking up the name in the Dictionary of National Biography, one finds that the adventurer, Sir William Stanley, when governor of Deventer, betrayed the town to the Spaniards in 1587, a much more up-to-date example of treachery.

CHAPTER VII

OUR EARLY ETYMOLOGISTS

FOR the etymological part of his Dictionary Dr. Johnson relied almost exclusively on Stephen Skinner's *Etymologicon Linguae Anglicanae* and the *Etymologicum Anglicanum* of Francis Junius. Both these works were compiled almost a century before the Doctor produced his own first edition (1755). They enjoyed an authority comparable to that of Ménage's *Origines de la Langue Française* (1650), and, well into the 19th century, continued to be quoted with respect by all writers on philological subjects. The fact that Junius was of foreign origin, while Skinner was a true-born Englishman, may have had some influence on the Doctor's opinion as to their relative merits :

For the Teutonick etymologies I am commonly indebted to Junius and Skinner, the only names which I have forborn to quote when I copied their books ; not that I might appropriate their labours or usurp their honours, but that I might spare a perpetual repetition by one general acknowledgment. Of these, whom I ought not to mention but with the reverence due to instructors and benefactors, Junius appears to have excelled in extent of learning, and Skinner in rectitude of understanding. Junius was accurately skilled in all the northern languages, Skinner probably examined the ancient and remoter dialects only by occasional inspection into dictionaries ; but the learning of Junius is often of no other use than to show him a track by which he may deviate from his purpose, to which Skinner always

presses forward by the shortest way. Skinner is often ignorant, but never ridiculous: Junius is always full of knowledge, but his variety distracts his judgment, and his learning is very frequently disgraced by his absurdities.

The votaries of the northern muse will not perhaps easily restrain their indignation when they find the name of Junius thus degraded by a disadvantageous comparison; but whatever reverence is due to his diligence, or his attainments, it can be no criminal degree of censoriousness to charge that etymologist with want of judgment, who can seriously derive *dream* from *drama*, because life is a drama, and a drama is a dream; and who declares with a tone of defiance, that no man can fail to derive *moan* from *μόνος*, who considers that grief naturally loves to be alone (Preface to the Dictionary).

Although this is altogether unjust, for, while Skinner was an amiable and cultured amateur, Junius was a great scholar and linguist, the Doctor here indicates the besetting sin of our early etymologists, their determination to trace everything to a Greek original. It is, however, hardly fair to credit Junius with the *dream* = *drama* equation, for he only quotes it from Meric C̃asaubon, who derived practically the whole English vocabulary from Greek.

The study of one's native language belongs only to an age of culture and national consciousness. The linguistic occupations of the Middle Ages, confined to the few learned, were almost entirely classical. The vernacular excited neither interest nor curiosity. The few scattered etymological conjectures to be found in medieval writers tend, as a rule, only in the direction of edification, just as their artless tales seem to exist only for the purpose of pointing a moral or deducing a theological parallel. Philippe de Thaun's derivation of *ven-*

dredi from 'veritatis dies' can hardly have been intended literally, any more than, at a later date, Bishop Latimer's explanation of a *homily* as a sermon in 'homely' language. Even in the 19th century could Carlyle really have believed that the *King* is the 'cunning' one, or Archbishop Trench that the *husband* is the 'band' that unites the 'house'? Junius, who was an accomplished Scandinavian scholar, gives what is substantially the correct etymology of *husband*, but writers went on repeating the early fable. Trench quotes it with apparent seriousness from Tusser, and an American lexicographer has recently gone one better by explaining the *husband* as one who is 'house-bound'!

The 16th century saw in most European countries an awakened interest in the vernacular and in the earlier native literature. Clément Marot admired and edited Villon. Spenser admired and imitated Chaucer. The antiquary and the etymologist made their appearance, just as they had done in the most high and palmy state of Rome, when Varro, 'most learned of the Romans', wrote his four hundred books, including his *De Lingua Latina*. It was to the Roman grammarians, such as Varro and Festus, both of whom were edited by the younger Scaliger, that the Renaissance philologists went for information and guidance. From them they derived their fantastic theories of derivation, the most amusing of which is the invocation of antiphrasis. This is exemplified by such etymologies as '*mons* a non movendo', '*bellum* quia

non bellum est', '*lucus* a non *lucendo*', etc. On this principle Scaliger identified *cold* with Latin *calidus*, hot. Another device is the anagram. The theory of our own etymologists that *woman* stands for 'woe-man' was perhaps inspired by the suggestion, to be found in the Etymologiæ of Isidore of Seville, that *Eva* is an anagram of *vae*! Not that the work of the Roman grammarians is negligible. Living nearer to the words they discussed, they had an acuter perception of their essential meanings. Much fantastic nonsense has been printed about the etymology of *explore*. It is only recently that modern philologists have discovered in Festus the quite logical explanation of *explorare*, to cry out, i.e. to 'descry', or announce by a shout, the presence of the game or the enemy.

The Renaissance etymologist was at a great disadvantage in dealing with the origin of his own language. He knew nothing of the inter-relation of languages or of phonetic laws. Accustomed, himself, to the more or less scholastic language that had sprung from classical Latin, and directly or indirectly from Greek, he supposed these classical tongues to be the origin of his own speech, and thus based his theories on a most airy foundation. The resemblance of a modern European word to a Greek word did not suggest to him an original kinship, but a direct borrowing from the ancients. This delusion, which persisted into the 19th century, was assisted by the traditional mythical history of northern Europe, in which Trojans, Greeks and Romans were inextricably mixed up,

and by almost complete ignorance of the earlier forms of the vernacular. If a learned theologian, the etymologist would seek the origin of a modern European language in Hebrew, while some French antiquaries, delving into the earlier history of their nation, became Celtomaniacs and derived everything from the unrecorded languages of ancient Gaul. It is true that they seldom had any knowledge of Celtic, but this only gave more elasticity to their methods. Thus, President Fauchet, one of the most learned and enthusiastic of French 16th-century antiquaries, derived *brigand* from the 'Celtic' *brig*, a bridge, because the crossing of bridges offers the best opportunity to the robber. But Greek was the chief stand-by of the Renaissance philologist. The great Isaac Casaubon solemnly derived *radoter* from *Hérodote*, while his son Meric, prebendary of Canterbury, went one better by finding the origin of *cockney* in the Greek *οἰκογενής*, domestic, home-bred!

It was inevitable that the early etymologists should notice that the superficial resemblance between Greek and Latin words and those of their own language was subject to certain disturbances. They explained these by apocope, syncope, metathesis, etc., very useful terms, of which Minsheu gives an explanation in his *Guide into Tongues*, but of which they made a use which staggers the modern student. Voss, in his great *Etymologicon Linguae Latinæ*, published at Amsterdam in 1662, begins with sixty terrifying pages *De Literarum Permutatione*, from which it may be inferred that any sound may

become any other sound. This general law seems to have been grasped by one of our own early investigators, who, realizing that the mysterious word *pod* is the 'home' of the seed, opines that the word 'seems to have been formed from *δῶμος* by transposition, thus *μόδος*, and then, converting the *μ* into *π*, *πῶδος*, contracted to *pod*'. Similarly, Ménage, whose *Origines de la Langue Françoise* (1650) is the first French etymological dictionary, derives the unexplained *marcher* from Latin *varicare*, from *varus*, which some explain as knock-kneed and others as bandy-legged. Since Molière caricatured him in *Les Femmes Savantes*, Ménage has been rather a joke to the layman, but few *érudits* of the age enjoyed a higher or more lasting reputation. He was a great and modest scholar, and, even if he did achieve such acrobatic feats as deriving *chez* from *apud* and *foie* from *ἥπαρ*, his pioneer work is most valuable.

The first in date of our own etymological dictionaries is that of John Minsheu. His *Ductor in Linguas*, or *Guide into Tongues*, was published, after great difficulties, in 1617. It gives, besides etymologies, the equivalents of each word in ten other languages. I once possessed three copies of this great folio, but, at the suggestion of Mr. Philip Snowden,¹ have recently parted with two of them. This is the first book printed in England with a list of subscribers, whose generosity alone made its publication possible. In fact, as one scans its vast and crowded pages of small print, much of it in

¹ Now Lord Snowden : formerly Chancellor of the Exchequer !

Greek and Hebrew character, one wonders that any press of those days was equal to the work. Still more does one wonder whether, in our own day, the richest and noblest in the land would lend their help so freely to a struggling scholar, who had 'not only spent thereon all his stock and substance, but also run himself into many and great debts, impossible for him ever to pay'. The list of subscribers begins with the King, the Queen, the Prince. The episcopate and the nobility make a good show. Oxford and Cambridge are represented by the heads of most Colleges, among whom we note Dr. Laud, President of St. John's College, Oxford. Then we have the Benchers of the various Inns of Court and the grouped headmasters of Pauls, Westminster, Marchant Tailors, Christs Hospitall and Suttons Hospitall (i.e. Charterhouse). Especially interesting is the name of Sir Henry Spelman, 'fift undertaker for great summes, when the work lay dead at the presse for want of mony'. Spelman was a typical cultured gentleman of a cultured age, an original member, with Camden and Cotton, of the Society of Antiquaries. He himself published a valuable *Glossarium Archæologicum* and founded an Anglo-Saxon readership at Cambridge. His glossary, a comprehensive explanation, historical and etymological, of administrative 'Latin', is not yet superseded.

One is glad to record that Minsheu's colossal work actually reached a second edition. It is still an indispensable aid to the study of Tudor English, and, amid its many and obvious absurdities, it is

possible occasionally to pick up a few valuable facts. He seems to have been a good modern linguist, especially in Spanish, and to have had a competent knowledge of Latin, Greek and Hebrew, from the last of which he is fond of deriving Anglo-Saxon monosyllables. Of Anglo-Saxon he naturally, like his contemporaries, knew little, and his wild Greek etymologies of *daisy* suggest that he had never read Chaucer. Having no real predecessors in this country, he relies chiefly on foreign scholars, especially the ancients. In his Epistle to the Reader he mentions Plato, Varro, Festus, Quintilian, Isidore, and, among moderns, Joseph Scaliger. He divides etymologies into three classes—'vera, verisimilia et ad placitum'—and it must be owned that the last of the three classes is well represented in his Guide. So far as I know he is the originator of the derivation of *apron* from 'afore one'. Correspondence of the initial letter is usually enough to lead him to a Latin or Greek origin. Thus *arrow* is from '*arundo*, a reede, because in the old time the arrowes were made of reedes'. *Pageant* is still a puzzle to etymologists, but Minsheu has the interesting conjecture that it comes from 'page' and 'giant', because both these figures are usually represented in such shows. *Poltroon* he naturally derives from French, but explains the French word as from Latin *pullorum latro*, a fowl stealer. Skinner, on the other hand, derives it from *pollice truncato*, one who had amputated his thumb to avoid military service. This fantasy seems to have originated with Saumaise

(Salmasius), 'the Varro of his age', who succeeded Joseph Scaliger at the Academy of Leyden: it was widely accepted by his learned contemporaries, is repeated by Johnson, and was still in school-books when I was a boy.

On the other hand, Minsheu gives what is now accepted as the substantially correct origin of *dismal*, from Latin *dies malus*, unfortunately followed by *dismay*, which 'taketh the name from the moneth of May, for in that moneth the flowers of the field, though never so beautifull, withered by the fervent heat of the sunne, hang their heads and fade away'. Like other etymologists of the age, the absence of any possible Latin or Greek original drives him into the region of the fantastic, as when he explains *stepmother* as one who 'steps' into the place of a 'mother', and the cognate Dutch *stiefmoeder* as 'rigida mater'. On Minsheu's etymology of *wanton*,¹ Dr. Johnson, expressing himself with more delicacy than his source, comments as follows—'This word is derived by Minsheu from "want one", a man or woman who wants a companion. This etymology, however odd, Junius silently adopts. Skinner, who had more acuteness, cannot forbear to doubt it, but offers nothing better.' Minsheu's comic etymology of *demure* from French *de mœurs* is as good an example of a persistent myth as the 'house-band' delusion. Junius treats it as a joke—'Suo more ludunt qui ex *de*

¹ For the history of this word, unique in formation so far as modern English is concerned, see my *More Words Ancient and Modern*.

moeurs dictum putant', but it is found in Johnson, even in the first edition of Skeat (1882), and is solemnly reproduced in Funk's Standard Dictionary (1922). So much for Minsheu. Quite apart from word-lore, his work contains vast and various information for every kind of archæologist, and I can think of few better single volumes for an intelligent Robinson Crusoe.

If Minsheu was, in Ben Jonson's opinion, a rogue, his successor, Stephen Skinner, appears to have been a man of very attractive character. An Oxford man and an M.D. of Heidelberg, he travelled widely and intelligently at a time when travelling was still an adventure, finally settling as a doctor in Lincolnshire, where, in 1667, at the age of forty-four, he died, a beloved physician, '*amicis carus et post obitum diu deflendus*', to quote his friend Henshaw. The latter, a travelled and cultured man and an original F.R.S., edited, in 1671, the *Etymologicon Linguae Anglicanae*, which Skinner had left in manuscript. The author's own preface acknowledges his debt to Continental scholars such as Ménage and Voss, but he is hard on Minsheu—'*Industriam eius probo, judicium & fidem non probo. Multa absurde, multa violenter, tanquam rudentibus detorquet. Saepe, ne etyma desint, vocabula ex proprio cerebro comminiscitur.*' Skinner had access to a knowledge of Anglo-Saxon which was denied to Minsheu, for Somner had published, in 1659, his *Dictionarium Saxonico-Latino-Anglicum*. Consequently, though Skinner wrote in Latin and still attributed to the classical languages too

large a share in the creation of English, he recognized the essentially Teutonic origin of the language. Thus, he discards Minsheu's derivation of *hag* from Hecate, and quotes the Anglo-Saxon *hægesse* from Somner, mentioning the cognate German *hexe*. Unfortunately, following his practice of offering the student an ample choice, he mentions an alternative etymology from Latin *saga*, a witch, 'cum nihil vulgarius sit quam sibili in spiritum & e contra transitus'. Sometimes, as in the case of *habergeon*, he puts forward three etymologies, the second introduced by 'vel potius' and the third by 'vel, quod omnium verisimillimum est'. *Garlic* is explained by Minsheu as 'garden-leek', with a long account of its medicinal virtues, including his own experience on a ship which, owing to contrary winds, took six weeks to get through the Straits of Gibraltar. On this occasion garlic 'proved so cordiall that it did dissolve and heat all the raw humours which the cold and ill water had bred in my stomacke'. Skinner, no doubt with Somner before him, interprets it correctly from Anglo-Saxon *gar*, spear. The permutation of initials worries him as little as it does Minsheu. He mentions the latter's etymology of *pageant*, but prefers as an origin the German *wagen*, in the sense of processional chariot. Johnson, it may be mentioned, inclines to '*pagan giant*, a representation of triumph used at return from holy wars; as we still have the Saracen's Head'. But Skinner has more than a glimmering of semantics, e.g. for *benumbed*, which Minsheu derives from Hebrew, he gives correctly the Anglo-

Saxon *benomen*, observing that 'Nos de pedum paralyssi laboranti dicimus, "his legs are taken away".' So, also, he gives the correct etymology of *taint*, from *tangere*, instead of the mistaken etymology from *tingere* (which appears even in the last edition of Skeat)—'ut vulgo dicimus, "it has gotten a touch".' Some young researcher in quest of a dissertation subject might do worse than investigate the life of this gentle and learned country doctor.

Skinner often quotes Dr. Th. Henshaw's opinions on etymological questions, and, as Henshaw prepared the MS. for the press, it is possible that some of the chief absurdities of the Etymologicon are not to be put down to Skinner himself. The latter gives what are now the accepted etymologies of *bumpkin* and *newfangled*, but, with his usual modesty, also mentions Henshaw's views, according to which *bumpkin* is derived from *pumpkin*, as a staple food of the class,¹ and the Chaucerian *newefangel* is connected with the 'new evangel', presumably the ideas of Wyclif! One of his quaintest articles is that on *burly*, 'q.d. *boorlike*, i.e. agricolæ similis. For farmers, because of their labours and the resulting heavy feeding, are rather large in body. Unless you would prefer it to be derived from German *gebüßlich*, decent, becoming, because *εὐσάρκεια*, with a moderate, but not enormous corpulence, is becoming to man, unbecoming to woman.'

Francis Junius was an older contemporary of

¹ Even the credulous Dr. Johnson finds this etymology 'harsh'.

Skinner and lived to a great age (1589-1677). Like some other early investigators of our language, such as Joseph Scaliger and Meric Casaubon, he was a foreigner. Of French descent, he was born at Heidelberg, travelled extensively, mastered the Scandinavian languages and Frisian, became librarian to the Earl of Arundel, edited Cædmon and the Gothic Bible of Ulfilas, bequeathed his Anglo-Saxon manuscripts to the University of Oxford, and was buried in St. George's Chapel, Windsor. It is interesting to note that he was the brother-in-law of Voss, the founder of Latin etymology. Another philological marriage of the Renaissance was that of Isaac Casaubon with a daughter of the great scholar-printer-lexicographer house of Estienne. Junius is frequently mentioned by Skinner, who no doubt possessed some of his numerous philological works, but his great *Etymologicum*, which must have been compiled before Skinner's, remained in MS. at the Bodleian, till it was edited, in 1743, by Edward Lye, an enthusiastic student of the Scandinavian languages. In the meantime Hickes had published (1703-5) his *Linguarum Veterum Septentrionalium Thesaurus*, the study of which led Lye to the Oxford MS. of Junius. His edition, with his own comments and supplementary matter indicated by an L, is a noble specimen of Oxford printing.

Junius writes in a less chatty style than Skinner. Sometimes, in place of an explanation, we are simply referred to Voss, Ménage, Meric Casaubon, etc., whose works are presumed to be in every gentleman's library. He also sets a new example

by quoting copiously from the classics, and also from Chaucer, Gavin Douglas, Ulphilas, Tatian, Otfried, etc. Some of his articles are masterly, e.g. that on *harangue*, which provoked the derisive bray of Horne Tooke (see p. 147). Some are intensely comic, their absurdity being usually due to attempts to link up Anglo-Saxon with a Latin or Greek original. Thus *empty* is associated with 'emetic', *home* is ultimately Greek *ἄμα*, at once, together,—'ut proprie denotet locum ubi simul esse solemus', and *freeze* is from Greek *φρίσσειν*, to bristle and shudder. It is interesting to note some of the changes of meaning that had come about while Junius's MS. was waiting for print. He gives the correct etymology for *buxom*, obedient, to which Lye adds, '*Buxom* ita a veteribus accipitur. Nunc vero ut plurimum usurpatur de puella hilari, alacri, laeta.' For Junius a *hearse* is 'cenotaphium, tumulus honorarius' ('Underneath this sable hearse . . .'), for Lye 'feretrum ab equis tractum'.

Lye was able to lay under contribution the work of the Celtic scholar Edward Lhuyd, who published his *Archæologica Britannica* in 1707. Both Skinner and Junius also refer frequently to John Davies, whose *Antiquæ Linguæ Britannicæ Dictionarium* appeared as early as 1632. Davies appears to have been a bit of a Celtomaniac, ready to derive any English word from Welsh, e.g. *denizen* from *dinaswr*, a citizen, but equally ready to derive any Welsh word from Greek, e.g. Old Welsh *haiarn*, iron, from **Αἰης*, the god of war. Junius also mentions his friend John Nicholas Vaughan,

Cambrobritannus, vir humanissimus', who quite convinced him that a *wicket* takes its name from Welsh *gwich*, squeak, 'quoniam rarius recluditur, atque ob hoc ipsum rauco rubiginosorum cardinum strepitu hominum aures plerumque offendit'.

It is easy to laugh at the odd fancies of these old scholars, who knew nothing about phonetics or Grimm's Law, but some of us envy their profound knowledge of Latin and Greek, to which many of them added something more than a bowing acquaintance with the chief modern European languages. They were no phoneticians, but they were invariably linguists, a qualification sometimes lacking in the equipment of modern writers on wordlore.

CHAPTER VIII

ETYMOLOGICAL MONOMANIACS

EVERY writer who ventures to publish a modest book on word-lore is apt to receive uninvited communications from the amateur philologist with a bee in his bonnet. Usually this enthusiast is prepared to deal with the whole question of the origin of language. Occasionally, and more mercifully, he is satisfied with a less ambitious thesis, such as the descent of modern English from Chaldee or the pre-historic colonization of the Antipodes by the Athenians, as proved by the 'obvious' or 'unquestionable' identity of the aboriginal Australian *gin*, woman, with the Greek *γυνή*. One can only reply that, as a mere dabbler, one is unqualified to express an opinion on such recondite theories.

This itch to clear up the origin either of human speech or of one's own native tongue has afflicted mankind ever since Jewish mystics invented the myth of the Tower of Babel, and, especially in the period following the Renaissance, it has had some very curious results. The 18th century is rich in those ambitious speculative treatises which preceded the more scientific and historical investigations made possible by the 'discovery' of Sanskrit, a discovery which inaugurated modern philology and

finally evicted Hebrew from the place it had usually occupied in the fantastic theories of earlier scholars. Among comprehensive works which form a sort of prelude to the science of comparative philology, as it is now understood, are Herder's *Ursprung der Sprache* (1772) and Adelung's *Mithridates*,¹ left unfinished at his death (1806). In this country, as early as 1751, James Harris, father of the first Earl of Malmesbury, had published his *Hermes*,² a *Philosophical Inquiry into Universal Grammar*, while from 1773 to 1792 Lord Monboddo was rather scandalizing the learned world with the successive volumes of his *Origin and Progress of Language*, in which man is treated as merely one among the animals. Monboddo was a great admirer of Harris, whose *Hermes* he describes as 'a work that will be read and admired as long as there is any taste for philosophy and fine writing in Britain'.

The above are all of great historical importance, but the authors generally laboured under the initial disadvantage of regarding language as beginning with the Hebrew writings of the Old Testament, while their mode of treatment was influenced by that 'philosophy' which was the curse of the 18th century. With the turn of the century a new era opens. It begins with the foundation, in 1784, of the Bengal Asiatic Society by Sir William Jones,

¹ *Mithridates*, King of Pontus (+ 62 B.C.), is said to have been fluent in twenty-two languages; hence the choice of his name for a work attempting to deal with the languages of the world.

² Interpretation was one of the multifarious activities of this Greek deity.

and the revelation of Sanskrit, the sacred language of the Brahmans. The study of this most ancient of the Indo-European languages, the records of which are nearly a thousand years older than the earliest Greek literature, made it possible to establish the general relations existing between the various families of the Aryan group (Greco-Latin, Teutonic, Celtic, Slavonic). In 1816 Franz Bopp inaugurated comparative philology with his work on the Conjugation of the Sanskrit Verb. He was followed by the Dane Rasmus Rask and the German Jakob Grimm, these three names representing the greatest triumvirate in the history of linguistics.

But the philological monomaniac remains untouched by scientific fact and documentary evidence, and all the learning of Bopp & Co. did not prevent Alexander Murray, appointed professor of Oriental languages at Edinburgh in 1812, from putting forward, in his History of the European Languages, the theory that all speech started with about a dozen monosyllables of the *bag*, *rag*, *swag* type—'They were uttered at first, and probably for several generations, in an insulated manner. The circumstances of the actions were communicated by gestures and the variable tones of the voice; but the actions themselves were expressed by their suitable monosyllable.' Thus *bag wag* meant 'bring water'; *bag bag bag*, 'they fought very much'. This the author considers 'a just and not imaginary specimen of the earliest articulate speech'.

In 1786, just two years after the foundation of the Asiatic Society, was published the first part of

one of the most remarkable books ever devoted to language, viz. *Epea Pteroenta*¹ or the *Diversions of Purley*, by John Horne Tooke² (1736-1812). The reader should refer to the *Dictionary of National Biography* for detailed information on this extraordinary man, whose leading trait appears to have been a determination to be 'agin' everybody, and especially, like some modern politicians, 'agin' his own country and its government. The schoolboy encounter in which he lost an eye is characteristic of the whole of his life, with its quarrels, feuds, trials and imprisonments. In 1778 he was in the King's Bench Prison for having published resolutions in favour of the American colonists 'murdered at Lexington', and it was there that he composed his first philological work, *A Letter to John Dunning Esq., on the English Conjunctions*, which was later incorporated in the *Diversions*. In fact, it was perhaps as a result of his prosecution, when he was, in his own words, 'the miserable victim of two prepositions and a conjunction', that he turned to the philosophical interpretation of language. The first part of the work, which is written in dialogue³ form, is dedicated to the University of Cambridge,

¹ 'Winged Words'.

² He was really John Horne, son of a successful London poulterer, whom he was accustomed to describe as 'an eminent Turkey merchant'. The father was prosperous enough to send his son to Eton and Cambridge. The name Tooke was assumed, along with a fortune and a country seat at Purley, from John Horne's friend and patron, William Tooke.

³ The interlocutors are the author himself, Dr. Beadon, Master of Jesus College, Cambridge, afterwards Bishop of Gloucester, and William Tooke.

the second part to the twelve jurymen who acquitted him when charged with high treason, in 1794, with the following footnote—‘The fears of my printer (which I cannot call unfounded, in the present degraded state of the press) do not permit me to expose (as ought to be done) the circumstances producing, preceding, accompanying, and following my strange trial of six days for High Treason, etc. etc.’

The Diversions of Purley is described in Chambers’s Biographical Dictionary as a ‘witty medley of etymology, grammar, metaphysics and politics’, while according to the Dictionary of National Biography, Tooke’s conception of philology ‘was intended to subserve a nominalism of the type of Hobbes’. I will leave aside the metaphysics and Hobbes, as beyond my comprehension, and concentrate on the simpler aspects of this most entertaining book. The author’s qualifications for the work consisted of a classical education and extraordinarily wide reading in the older periods of the language. He seems, however, rather to despise the classical tongues and to regret that the time wasted on them at school should not be devoted to the ‘Nordic’ languages, which he regards as of much greater antiquity and dignity than Greek and Latin. He does not appear to have had much knowledge of foreign languages, though he occasionally quotes from French and Italian writers. Probably he knew little or no German. The following is a good example of his literally ‘preposterous’ method—‘Our etymologists derive *wall* from the

Latin *vallum*. . . . They seem to forget that the Latin is a mere modern language, compared with the Anglo-Saxon. The Roman beginning (even their fable) is not, comparatively, at a great distance. The beginning of the Roman language we know, and can trace its formation step by step. But the Northern origin is totally out of sight ; is entirely and completely lost in its deep antiquity. . . . *Vallum* itself is no other than our word *wall*, with the addition of their article *um* tacked to it.' It need hardly be said that this is nonsense. From the Romans the Teutons learnt to replace the primitive stockade or 'hedge' by a solid rampart, *vallum* (this is still the sense of *wall* in German). The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle tells us that Bam-borough was first enclosed by a 'hedge', later by a 'wall'.

Being absolutely convinced that he is right and that all who differ from him are ignorant or prejudiced, an affliction characteristic of the *idée fixe* sufferer, he is very contemptuous of all other workers on the same field. He often mentions Minsheu, Skinner and Junius, but only to deride their 'illusions'. Harris and Lord Monboddo also come under the lash, and he can hardly contain himself at the name of Dr. Johnson, whom he usually calls S. Johnson, and whose Dictionary is 'a disgrace to the country'. Thus, discussing the word *harangue*, which he crazily describes as 'the pure and regular past participle, *hrang*, of the Anglo-Saxon verb *hringan*, to sound', he remarks that 'This word has been exceedingly laboured by

a very numerous band of etymologists ; and upon no occasion have their labours been more unsuccessfully employed. S. Johnson, as might be expected, has improved upon all his predecessors ; and, as he is the last in order of time, so is he the first in fatuity. . . . I will not trouble you with a repetition of the childish conjectures of others, nor with the tedious gossiping tale of Junius.’¹

He is still more venomous when he can drag in a political allusion, e.g., he illustrates the meaning of the archaic preposition *along of* by the two following sentences—‘Thanks to Pitt: it is along of him that we not only keep our boroughs, but get peerages into the bargain.’ ‘Curses on Pitt: it is along of him that the free constitution of this country is destroyed.’ He describes the rather archaic *nether* as ‘at present fallen into great contempt and rarely used but in ridicule and with scorn: and this may possibly have arisen from its former application to the House of Commons, anciently called (by Henry VIII) “the nether house of parliament”. That the word should have fallen into disgrace is nothing wonderful: for in truth this nether end of our parliament has for a long time been a mere sham and mockery of representation, but is now become an impudent and barefaced usurpation of the rights of the people.’

His chief animosity is directed against William Windham (1750–1810), a distinguished statesman who held various important offices during his

¹ See p. 139. As Junius shows, *harangue* is ultimately the Teutonic *ring*, in the sense of circle of debaters, etc.

political life. Windham was a member of a great Norfolk family, which takes its name from Wymondham, in that county. I do not know what share, if any, he had in our author's prosecution. Richard Taylor, who prepared a new edition of the *Diversions* in 1829, suggests that Horne Tooke seems to have held Windham, as member for Norwich, partly responsible for a damaging criticism of his theories by Dr. Bruckner, pastor of the Walloon Church in that city. Bruckner, it may be mentioned, had a first-hand knowledge of some languages about which the *Diversions* burble rather ignorantly. A long tirade on Horne Tooke's wrongs (Part I, ch. viii) ends—'But no more of these cowardly assassins. I consign them to the lasting contempt they have well earned, and which no future title will ever be able to obliterate from the name of Windham.' In the section in which he 'proves' that *coward* is the past participle of the verb to *cower*, he quotes a passage from Thomas Windham's *Voyage to Benin*, 1553. This extract from a Tudor explorer is apparently included so as to allow of the footnote—'This Thomas Windham was a Norfolk gentleman: and a curious account is given in this voyage of his usurping and cruel conduct, and of his mean, violent, selfish and tyrannical character.' From all of which it would appear that the *Diversions* of Purley is hardly a work of purely philological interest.

The first part of the book is chiefly devoted to adverbs, prepositions and conjunctions, and an attempt is made to prove that all these so-called

particles are really worn-down forms of nouns, verbs or phrases. This is, of course, partly true, and the author sometimes hits the mark, as when he proclaims the archaic *eke*, also, to be the imperative of the verb to *eke*, i.e. to augment; but most of his rapprochements are ludicrous, e.g. *yet* is the imperative of Anglo-Saxon *gietan*, to get, *else* the imperative of *aliesan*, to dismiss, *though* the imperative of *thafian*, to permit, while *lest* is the past participle of *liesan*, to release, and *since* the participle of *seon*, to see—‘In short, there is not such a thing as a Conjunction in *any* language, which may not, by a skillful Herald, be traced home to its own family and origin; without having recourse to contradiction and mystery with Mr. Harris; or, with Mr. Locke, cleaving open the head of man to give it such a birth as Minerva’s from the head of Jupiter.’

As already mentioned, his first interest in the subject of language seems to have been evoked by an attempt to make the conjunction *that* and the prepositions *of* and *concerning* ‘the abject instruments of his political extinction’. Consequently the word *that* occupies a large share of his space, so large, indeed, as to be somewhat bewildering; but the essential is that *that* is ‘merely the past participle of the Anglo-Saxon verb *thean*, “to *the*, to get, to take, to assume”, while *the* (our article, as it is called) is the imperative of the same verb *thean*. . . .’ For instance:

The man that hath not musicke in himselfe, etc.
Take man; *taken man* hath not musicke, etc.

Part II opens with Sir Francis Burdett's¹ reproachful words—'But your Dialogue, and your Politics, and your bitter Notes——' and then goes on to discuss the 'Rights of Man', in connection with which our author takes occasion to deride the use of the word *right* by a contributor to the Morning Chronicle, whose article 'is a piece of wretched mummery employed to bring back again to France the more wretched mummery of Pope and Popery'. Roughly speaking, the whole of Part II is devoted to 'proving' that all nouns and adjectives were originally forms of verbs, usually past participles. Here again, the author is approximately right in obvious cases, e.g. when he points out that *wrong* 'means merely *wrung*, or wrested from the *right* line of conduct'; but most of his derivations can hardly be read without hilarity. The following examples are taken almost at random—'*Bread* is the past participle of the verb to *bray* (French *broyer*), i.e. to pound, or to beat to pieces; and the *subauditum* (in our present use of the word *bread*) is corn, or grain, or any other similar substances, such as chestnuts, acorns, etc., or any other substitutes which our blessed ministers may appoint for us in this blessed reign.' *Heaven* is what is *heaved*, *bacon* what is *baked*, and *stern*, in both senses, is the past participle of *stir*—'whether we say, a stern countenance, i.e. a moved countenance, or

¹ Sir Francis Burdett (1770–1844) is the interlocutor of Part II. He was a kind of revolutionary conservative, who, like Tooke, was always in hot water and sometimes in prison. He married Sophia Coutts of the great banking dynasty.

the stern of a ship, i.e. the moved part of a ship, or that part by which the ship is moved'. *Bad* is what is 'bayed at', *good* what is 'ge-owed', *bold* is the past participle of *build*, 'and thus a man of confirmed courage, i.e. a confirmed heart, is properly said to be a builded, built, or bold man'; a *plot* is what is 'plighted', a *knight*, being a kind of attaché, is obviously one who is 'knit'. As for *skill*, *scale*, *scald*, *shale*, *shell*, *shoal*, *school*, *scull*, *shoulder*, *shilling*, *slate*, 'At first sight these words may seem to have nothing in common with each other; little at least in the sound, less in the meaning. Yet are they all the past participle of the Anglo-Saxon verb *scielian*, to divide.' 'Mould and malt, though now differently pronounced, written, and applied by us, are one and the same French word *mouillé*.' A *wench* is one who is 'winked at', and the *bark* of the tree and of the dog are identically from *beorgan*, to protect, for 'the bark of a dog is that by which we are defended by that animal'. When, finally, we come to the points of the compass, we find that *East* is the past participle of Anglo-Saxon *iersian*, to rage, *West* of *wesan*, to soak, *North* is the third person singular of *nierwan*, to narrow, and *South* is the past tense and past participle of *seothan*, to seethe, the identity of French *Sud* with our soap-suds being too obvious to call for argument—'And now, I suppose, I may conclude the subject.'

With all its craziness, the *Diversions of Purley* did much to arouse an interest in philology. The book is brilliantly written and furnishes a vast

material of quotations from all periods of the language. It had, with the reading public of the ending 18th century, smaller but much better educated than that of our own day, the success of a popular novel, and the author is said to have been offered four thousand pounds for the copy-right of Part II. Verily, the word-hunter's life in the reign of George III was a happy one. Men of light and leading were impressed by this 'philosophical' treatment of the subject, among them James Mill, the historian, father of a more famous son. Charles Richardson, the Clapham school-master, whose *New English Dictionary* (1835-37), largely inspired by Tooke's theories, was intended to replace Johnson and rival Webster, says in his Preface, 'Time will assuage the rancour of political hostility; the mists of ignorance, the fumes of conceit will dissipate in time; and the immortal author of the *Epea Pteroenta* will stand forth untarnished and unobscured as the philosophical grammarian who alone was entitled to the name of a discoverer.' Richardson is very hard on Johnson's Dictionary—'It is needless, and would be invidious, to accumulate especial instances of failure;—the whole is a failure,' but his own etymologies are little less crazy than the Doctor's. His work has, however, real value because of the abundance of the quotations.

Three years before the publication of Part I of the *Diversions* there appeared the most fantastic etymological dictionary ever compiled by a man of learning. I am fortunate enough to possess the

author's own annotated copy of A Derivative Dictionary of the English Language, by the Reverend George Lemon, Rector of Geytonthorpe and Vicar of East Walton, Norfolk (London, 1783). It is to be regretted that Horne Tooke does not appear to have known this work, for it would have afforded him still further matter for vituperation. Not only are the reverend author's etymological theories the exact opposite of Tooke's, but he was for some ten years master of the Grammar School at Norwich, a city which also harboured Tooke's chief critic and which he therefore seems almost to class with Sodom and Gomorrah. As already indicated, Tooke regarded Greek and Latin as mere insignificant patois, of little antiquity compared with the noble Northern languages. Lemon, on the other hand, derives practically the whole of the English vocabulary from Greek. His title-page describes the work as compiled from Voss, Meric Casaubon, Spelman, Somner, Minsheu, Junius, Skinner, Verstegan, Ray, Nugent, Upton, Cleland. Most of these are mentioned in the previous chapter. He seems to have been chiefly inspired by Meric Casaubon,¹ son of the great Isaac Casaubon. He has the greatest contempt for Verstegan,² who, as early as 1605, had quite rightly decided that 'Our ancient English-Saxon language is to bee accompted the Teutonic tounge, & albeit wee have in later ages

¹ See p. 130. I have not seen Casaubon's treatise, *De Veteri Lingua Anglica*, which, from the quotations of the later etymologists, apparently derives the entire English vocabulary from Greek.

² A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence (Antwerp, 1605).

mixed it with many borrowed woords, espetially out of the Latin and French ; yet remaineth the Teutonic unto this day the grownd of our speech '. That this ' Teutonic ' dates from the Tower of Babel is proved for Verstegan by the fact that, ' when it hapneth that any one chanceth to speak confusedly or vainely, without sence or from the purpose, wee say unto him What Babel you ? or by mispronountiation, What bable you ? '

Briefly, the Rev. Mr. Lemon, who follows the Biblical chronology and the fabulous pre-history of Britain, considers that English is descended from Greek, the Druids, apparently a kind of male dryads, having arrived from Greece *c.* 2000 B.C. The Britons, i.e. the offspring of Brutus of Troy, and later on the Romans and Saxons, may have added a few words, but their contribution is insignificant. In fact—' No person can thoroughly understand the power and energy of the English tongue who does not trace it up to the Greek :—thus, for instance, everyone knows the meaning of the following words, as being part of a lady's dress, viz. her cap, handkerchief, apron, ruffles, lace, gown and sacque ; or the following as being part of the furniture of her work-basket, rapper (neither I nor the Oxford Dictionary can explain this word), silk, thread, scissors, needles, pins :—thus every one knows the meaning of these expressions, the duce take it ; such a thing is spick and span new ; everyone knows the meaning of the words bridle, saddle, stirrops, whip, boots, spurs and journey ; but does everyone know the derivation

of these words, and that all and each of them are Greek?'

I should like to quote extensively from Mr. Lemon, but, where all is so succulent, selection is difficult. Among Greek words he classes *Witenagemot* and *worsted*. Though a Norfolk man himself, he rejects the town of Worstead¹ in favour of 'wool's thread'—'and are not *wool* and *hread* as evidently Greek?' He accepts the fantastic etymology of *beefeater*,² perhaps due to George Steevens (+ 1800), from *buffet*, 'consequently Greek'. *Whist* is so called as being the 'wisest' game, 'therefore Greek'. Turning over the pages at random, one is interested to come across a famous murderer, who was also a learned and imaginative philologist. Under the word *beagle* (still a puzzle to etymologists), Mr. Lemon tells us that 'that ingenious, though unhappy man, Eugene Aram, has given the true derivation of this word'. On the next page we find that 'our word *belly* seems to be taken from the middle of the word *um-bili-cus*; as may be observed in many other examples'. Here is one of the many other examples—'We ought to deduce the word *gospel* purely from the Greek through the Saxon thus;—we have seen that both *God* and *good* are but abbreviations of *a-gath-os*: and the word *spell* is but another abbreviation of *apoballo*, *appello*, *loquor*.' As for *heaven*, Mr. Lemon is 'almost

¹ Unlike John Paston, who writes, 'I wold make my doblot all worsted for worship of Norffolk' (Paston Letters, ii, 235).

² For the history of this word see my *More Words Ancient and Modern*.

induced' to regard it as identical with *hyphen*, with a vague suggestion of universal union. He is by no means hostile to Celtic origins, so long as it is realized that Celtic borrowed regularly from Greek. Among the authorities mentioned on the title-page is one Cleland, of whom I know nothing except that he was obviously a certifiable Celto-maniac. Lemon quotes him freely, e.g. 'There is great reason to think that the word *Iscariot*, applied to Judas, who betrayed Jesus Christ, is not a Hebrew proper name, nor the designation of his birthplace, but a Celtic term of reproach: viz. Judas, *Ish-car-jood*; or Judas, the accursed Jew.' A very long article on *Oxford* concludes that 'Oxford at last is Greek and a wonderfully strange derivation from *hudōr*, water, or river; the first syllable of which Greek word the ancient Britons converted first into *fu*, or *wu*, then into *wy*, *gwy*, *wys*, *wysk*, *isca*, *ousca*, *osca*, *oscaford*, *Oxford*; as for *ford* it is evidently Greek'. When, periodically, some thirster after knowledge writes to the papers to ask the origin of the expression to 'rule the roost (or roast)', he invariably elicits a reply, taken from an antiquated Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, that *roost* (or *roast*), in this phrase, is a corruption of *raadst*, council, from 'German'. Cleland, says Mr. Lemon, 'has, with the greatest sagacity, observed that this expression originates from the Celtic language, in which a counsellor of state was called the *raadt*, and the council itself the *raadst*'—'Only now', continues our lexicographer, 'it happens unfortunately to be Greek, for both

rule and *roast*, or rather *raadst*, are visibly descended from *rhabdos*, quasi *raabst*, the rod of power.' Most of all Mr. Lemon's etymologies I love that of *snake*, from Greek *akē*, point (the snake being a pointed animal!), which would become in English *ake*, while *an ake* would easily be corrupted to *a nake*, 'and putting an s before it, to represent the form of the creature, we have called it a *snake*'. He admits, however, to my great regret, that this derivation may be too figurative and 'ænigmatical'.

Mr. Lemon's Dictionary was published with a list of subscribers. The Episcopate, the Upper House, the Heads of Oxford and Cambridge colleges, and especially the gentry of Norfolk seem to have rallied round in accordance with the best traditions. The author has analysed the list for his own satisfaction and has found Archbishops—1, Lords Spiritual—10, Lords Temporal—4, Knights—11, Esquires—109, Clergy—81, Gentlemen—61, Ladies—6, Doctors in Divinity—41, in Physic—10, in Music—1, a very creditable bag! The Dictionary of National Biography describes his work as worthless. Not quite, for some later owner has used this laboriously annotated copy to press ferns, and the present possessor would not part with it for much fine gold. Lemon was evidently a sound Greek scholar and an amiable and well-meaning man. He has two grievances (apart from their failure to recognize the identity of English and Greek!) against his predecessors. One is their use of Latin instead of English, the other their inclusion and discussion of indelicate words—'Let me then

here assure those Ladies, who have done me the honour of their names to this Work, and others who may be pleased at any time to consult it, that there is not an article in it that can give the least offence; but that every one has been carefully attended to, and rendered such as might entertain a modest eye, and please the chastest ear.'

Last and least of our triumvirate of monomaniacs is the Rev. Walter Whiter, who was guilty of an *Etymologicum Magnum* or Universal Etymological Dictionary (Cambridge, 1800). He was a Cambridge man and for thirty-five years rector of Hardingham, a Norfolk village (Norfolk again!) situated near the place of origin of Horne Tooke's detested Windhams. His theory seems to be that all the languages of the world are closely related and all their vocabularies are evolved from a very small number of consonantic roots. In fact, his investigation started with his 'discovery' that 'the radical C P, with different points or vowels, signified a Species of Dress, a Vessel for Drinking and a Covering for the Head, etc. etc. The forms, which it assumes in our language, under these senses are *Cope* (an ancient dress of priests), *Cup*, *Cap*, etc.' After this all was plain sailing, so that 'All my doubts on the subject at once vanished; I could no longer entertain any suspicions respecting the truth of my hypothesis', with the gratifying result that 'Here at last we have obtained what has ever been sought, but never been discovered—the Universal or Original Language'.

Part the First, all that I possess of Mr. Whiter,

possibly all that appeared, is devoted to this magic radical. He is not so entertaining as his two predecessors, for his cocksureness is almost too idiotic to be amusing. He has no use for the real scholars who are investigating Sanskrit—‘Did our great Eastern luminaries, Sir William Jones, etc., when they tell you of the learned *Pundits*, from whom they received instruction; did they never remember their English, their Latin or their Greek, and discover that they were talking with the *Ponderers*—the *Pendentes*—the *Punthanominoi*? It is marvellous indeed, that men like these, professedly and perpetually engaged in the study of languages, should thus slumber over their theme, and be unconscious of all that is ever passing before their eyes, and ever ringing in their ears.’ On the other hand he takes quite seriously Chatterton’s mystifications and quotes freely from the Rowley poems. His book consists chiefly of absurd conglomerations of unrelated words which he supposes to spring from one original. A simple example is ‘*Board* belongs to the great race of words *Bed—Boat—Boot—Booth—Boutique*, etc. etc.’ More often he spreads himself also in Persian, Chaldee, Romany, etc.—‘*Gevan*, we have seen, is the appropriate and familiar name for Man in the Chaldee language; and we have perceived the same word in our humble English term *Gaffer*, the venerable, though rustic father of a family. . . . To this name for Man, G B R or J B R, we must refer a term expressive of a state or condition, to which this creature of accident is perpetually exposed: *Jeopardy*, fear or

danger, is the lot of the *Gevār* or the *Jeopār*.' In short, the Rev. Walter Whiter was an egregious ass. Like all his class, he is violently condemnatory of better men, e.g. in his Index we find 'Mr. Bryant. His conjectures false and futile.' 'Etymologists (profound ignorance of). Passim.' 'Johnson (Dr.). The author of the most voluminous Dictionary in the English language. His name only once mentioned on a point of etymology, which refers to an anecdote of his superlative ignorance in that art.' 'Jones (Sir Wm.). His Persian Grammar an injudicious work.' 'Lennep and his followers. The most ridiculous of etymologists.'

It must not be supposed that the genus Whiter is extinct. Few years pass without the appearance of some pretentious volume in which all the philological science gradually built up by scholars is brushed contemptuously aside and some new idiocy put forward with the confidence of ignorance. But rather than dwell on this disease, and on the deluded or dishonest reviewing which encourages it, let us finish with one more cheerful quotation from the imaginative Whiter—' *Kiss*, which has found its way into so many languages, is one of the most ancient and universal words in the records of Speech. We may perpetually trace it under this peculiar sense or with a kindred idea; and in the Persian language we may see the leading notion unfolded in the familiar term *Khush*, good, sweet, excellent, beautiful, fair, charming, delicious, pleasant, delightful, agreeable, cheerful, amiable,

lovely, delicate, etc.' From which it would seem that kissing is, even etymologically, a cushy¹ job. Further, *kiss* 'is connected with the name of *Sugar*—*Saccharum*, etc. etc., which is to be found in so many forms of speech. The uninitiated reader will perhaps be astonished to find that these mystic words are familiar to his ear in the humble terms of *Chest* and *Sack*; and I shall leave for the present the coeval antiquity of the *Kiss*, the *Chest* and the *Sack* as a profound enigma, for the benefit of some adventurous Œdipus in the mysteries of Etymology.'

¹ *Cushy* is Anglo-Indian slang, from Persian *khush*.

CHAPTER IX

ETYMOLOGY FROM EARLSWOOD

THE previous chapter deals with three men of learning who allowed their reasoning powers to be quelled by a fixed delusion. They may, philologically, be described as lunatics and their works are of the nature of ravings. We now come to that less interesting class which gibbers. John Bellenden Ker, whose real name was Gawler, shared Horne Tooke's radical politics and bitter hostility to the Church of Rome. He is described by the Dictionary of National Biography as 'botanist, wit and man of fashion'. He was an officer in the Coldstreams, forced to resign his commission on account of his sympathy with the French Revolution, an unsuccessful claimant to the dukedom of Roxburgh, and the first editor (1812) of the Botanical Register. His philological adventures, a side-line to his really important botanical studies, seem to have been inspired by the theories of the Dutch poet Bilderdijk, with whom philology was also a side-line, and to have been directed almost exclusively at demonstrating the iniquity of the Papacy. He was the author of an Essay on the Archæology of our Popular Phrases and Nursery Rhymes. This work, which attains the possible limits of

human idiocy, seems to have had some success, for I possess it in a new edition of 1837, in two volumes with a Supplement.

The author's thesis is that modern Dutch represents approximately that form of Low German from which English originated and that our popular phrases and nursery rhymes, when transmuted into the Dutch sounds which they vaguely resemble, will be found to be totally corrupted versions of pre-historic lampoons against the tyranny of the Church of Rome. Thus 'such a jingle as Diccorry, diccorry, dock, The mouse ran up the clock, when restored to the state in which first produced ceases to be an unmeaning metrical farrago, and is clearly a Pasquinade, elicited by the soreness felt by the population at the intrusion of a foreign and onerous church-sway, bringing with it a ministry to which a goaded people imputed fraud and exaction'. The later perversion into apparently harmless nursery rhymes was due to the Satanic ingenuity of the friars.—'An unparalleled and constant corruption of the dialect, in which they were composed, was taken advantage of, and the invective of the lampoon was gradually modernized by the introduction of a harmless, unmeaning medley of a precisely similar sound and metre, in the latest form of the altered dialect; till in time the original import was forgotten, and its venom and familiar use replaced by the present Nursery Rhymes.' The trouble seems to have begun with the rather strenuous conversion of the heathen Saxons by Charlemagne, 'this bigotted and ferocious tool of the Pope',

and 'the outrageous bearing of the satellites of the Roman Church, under the protection of this imperial scourge. Far from being harsh and exaggerating sarcasms, these compositions are in reality comparatively lenient and understating expositions of the conduct of the lazy, libertine, rapacious satellites of an outlandish and anti-national Church.'

So Diccory, diccory, dock, etc., becomes, in the archaic Dutch which this demented philologist took from Kilian's 16th-century dictionary—

Dick-oore, dick-oore, dock;
De mae's ran op de klokke.
De klokke strack won,
De mae's ran toe hun,
Dick-oore dick-oore, dock—

which, being interpreted, is quite obviously 'Thick-headed dolt, you dolt bring out what you have for our use. The churchman is in want of a fresh supply of provisions. The churchman got at once what he demanded with such hardy impudence. Don't you hear? The churchman tells you provisions run short with him? Bring out at once, you thick-headed dolt, all what he orders so impudently.' From which it may be inferred that archaic Dutch, as understood by Mr. Bellenden Ker, could say a great deal in a few words! By the same infallible method the Piper's son, Margery Daw, Jack Sprat, Bo-peep, Jack Horner and the rest are shown to be artful monkish substitutions for honest Saxon invective against an alien Church.

He is equally clear about popular phrases, e.g. 'he is out at the elbows', which, as it stands, is

'perfect nonsense', really stands for 'Hie is uit aet; die helboos, q.e. Here provision is all gone; the parson as vexed as hell'; 'out of sorts' is corrupted from 'Houd af; soert's, q.e. Keep out of the way, he is in a sour mood', and 'He went the whole hog' should be 'Hij wendt de hold hogh, q.e. He turned the feelings of a friend towards the subject in question', where again archaic Dutch seems to have a singular power of concise expression. It might be said of Mr. Bellenden Ker that 'vires acquirit eundo', for, having tasted blood, he soon begins to derive the whole colloquial vocabulary of English in the same way, e.g. *simpleton* is 'Sie 'em ! pelle toe hun, q.e. Look at him ! there's plucking for you', and *ninny* is 'Er nie inne hije, q.e. All the pain that can be taken never puts anything into that one', another example of *multum in parvo*.

Although this work seems to have had with the general public a measure of the success of which blatant absurdity is usually assured, it did not escape some unfriendly criticism—'Among the critics, whose attention had been called by the first publication of the present essay, is the scribe of a paper called The Athenæum, who, in addition to much indefinite scolding and vulgar abuse, has introduced a barefaced and evidently intentional untruth, by asserting, etc., etc. I have noticed this untruth solely that the effrontery of the writer might not impose upon any one; otherwise, as respects ruffianly abuse, studied falsehood, and want of argument, the writer of that paper has, in regard to this Essay, a rival in the editor of The Times.'

Another philologist with a grievance against the critics is Morgan Kavanagh, of whom I know no more than that he produced *The Origin of Language and Myths*, and, in 1869, sent it to the *Institut* in competition for the *prix Volney*, established by the will of the Comte de Volney, philosopher and philologist (+ 1820). The judges, who probably, not to say naturally, took the author for a lunatic, awarded the prize to Max Müller, whose *Lectures on Language* before the Royal Institution were, in Mr. Kavanagh's opinion, a concatenation of blunders. The consequence is that, in the second volume, published some years later, Renan, Littré and other famous philologists get it hot. Mr. Kavanagh even made what would now be called a sporting offer, viz. a bet of one thousand francs to one hundred that he had made the discovery of the origin of language. Apparently both Renan and Littré were lacking in the true spirit of adventure, so 'this challenge is now left equally open to M. Adolphe Regnier and M. Max Müller, should either of those gentlemen be so rash as to accept it. Nor let it be supposed that it is courage they stand in need of on this occasion, but of something else which is much more easily found than courage. And what is that pray? It is foolishness; for if these four gentlemen were to take up this challenge, they could not escape being regarded, by every enlightened man acquainted with this work and its proofs, as four of the greatest simpletons in all Christendom, seeing that their discomfiture would to all except themselves appear self-evident.' As for 'the lying reviewer of *The*

Athenæum', our author regards him as too contemptible for argument—'He who could not only grossly misrepresent, but who could also add shameful falsehoods to his wilful misrepresentation is too low, too disreputable to be noticed in any other way than by holding him up to the hatred and scorn of all the respectable members of the press.'

So far as I understand Mr. Kavanagh, he regards the whole of language as having developed from an O which was suggested by the shape of the sun. 'For acquiring this conviction no more is needed than to make the mouth take a circular form, so as to represent that of the sun, and then for the sole purpose of drawing attention to the sign so produced, to utter a sound; by which means the first significant word was known, and the parent of all other words will be heard.' This O was used for several of our elementary concepts such as sun, light, heat, etc., but it also meant 'one'. However, to avoid ambiguity, an I was added to it in the last sense, and the close contiguity of OI naturally resulted in *al*, after which the rest was easy. Among our author's minor discoveries are the convenient fact that 'any letter can become any other letter', and the equally helpful law that all words may be read backwards as well as forwards, 'for why should English not have the same privileges as Hebrew?' The advantage of the Hebrew method may be illustrated by the following example—'If we read *spot*, a place, from right to left, what shall we obtain if not *tops*, and what is *tops*, when the vowel due between the *p* and *s* is

supplied, but *topos*, and this is the Greek for place. When in like manner we read *skin* from right to left, what have we? *Niks*; and as here the *i* has *o* understood, and as *o* and *i* make *a*, we obtain *naks*, of which the *nak* is the radical part of *naked*, and to be in one's skin is to be naked.' Similarly, 'though *truth* and *verity* are so very different in appearance, they are, however, radically the same. In order to discover how this can possibly be, let us only observe that as *u* and *v* are, as everyone knows, the same sign, it follows that the *tru* of *truth* is equal to *trv*, and as a vowel is due between two consonants, we find that *trv* cannot, when we read after the Hebrew manner from right to left, differ from the *verit* of *verity*, the vowel inserted between *v* and *r* being *e*, and the one between *r* and *t* being *i*.' By the same method it is shown that *wolf* and *fox* are identical words, being named, like water, from their swift movement, 'and is not *wolf* the same as *flow* read from right to left?'

Another help to the etymologist is the fact that W is simply M inverted, 'of which a very clear instance is afforded by the word *wicked* and its French *méchant*, *wick* being the radical part of *wicked* and *mèche* (which has the meaning of wick) being the radical part of *méchant*'. After which it becomes mere child's play to establish the identity of *mind* and *wind*.

By these methods our friend is able to throw valuable light on ancient myth and Biblical allegory — 'When Eve was tempted by the serpent, we are taught to believe that the serpent was the devil.

Here we should not fail to observe that in *Eve*, *evil* and *devil* we have radically the same word. Even the English word *apple* cannot differ from *evil*, as we must perceive on giving to the *v* of *evil* its form *p* (witness *Avril* and *April*), as *evil* will then become *epil*, which, from *e* being equal to *o*, and *o* to *oi*, and *oi* to *a*, is the same as *apil*. . . . Is not the Latin *malum* a still more startling instance, since it means not only an apple, but evil and wickedness also ? ’

It would seem unkind to laugh at Mr. Kavanagh, were it not that his firmness of conviction makes him impervious to ridicule. He is himself not without a sense of humour, especially when he depicts Littré, Max Müller and the other conspirators sitting in solemn conclave to concert measures for the suppression of his theories. He modestly disclaims any great share of ingenuity—‘The sole cause of my success must be ascribed to my knowledge of the origin of human speech, even of man’s first word, the *o* ; and that this sign has always *i* understood just as *i* has *o* when either sign comes singly ; and that when both signs are allowed to join they make *a*.’ At the same time he is confident that when Messrs. Littré, Max Müller, Adolphe Regnier and Renan are all dead and gone, ‘this twofold discovery of mine, which they now affect to despise, and which from their souls they will hate as long as they live, must be then well known, and not merely to every philologist, but to every philosopher over the whole civilized world’.

In a book on Surnames published a few years

ago, by an author who seems bent on correcting the errors of such bunglers as the present writer, appears the astounding statement that 'Although the Anglo-Saxon language gradually ousted the British, large numbers¹ of the native words remained, and are in use in England to the present day'. On this point we are recommended to see Mackay's *Gaelic Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*. Well, I have 'seen' the said Dictionary and would strongly advise any lover of innocent merriment to see it also. The Celto-maniac heresy, which has already been alluded to (pp. 130, 156), breaks out periodically, but seldom so delightfully as in Dr. Charles Mackay's entertaining work. The full title is *The Gaelic Etymology of the Languages of Western Europe and more especially of the English and Lowland Scotch, and of their Slang, Cant, and Colloquial Dialects*. The title-page bears two epigraphs, one from the Duke of Somerset,—'Every word in human language has its pedigree'—the other from Dr. Alexander Murray (see p. 143)—'Without a considerable knowledge of Gaelic no person can make any proficiency whatever in philology', which is hard on us humble students who have no Gaelic.

The Dictionary was published by subscription in 1877 and dedicated by special permission to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales (afterwards King Edward VII). The list of subscribers is im-

¹ The number of Celtic words adopted by Anglo-Saxon is certainly not more than half a dozen. Some philologists even reduce it to two.

pressive. It includes three royal princes, the four Scottish universities, the Dukes of Argyll, Buccleuch, Hamilton and Sutherland, along with many men of comparatively humble station such as marquises, earls, etc. A rather lengthy Introduction points out the quite erroneous ideas by which, before Dr. Mackay, philologists had been guided in their investigations. Just as the Rev. George Lemon would have regarded Horne Tooke as showing glimmerings of the truth, if he had only substituted 'Greek' for his 'Northern', so Dr. Mackay is inclined to accept most of Tooke's views, with one essential alteration — 'If, whenever he mentions either the Northern language or the Anglo-Saxon, we were to substitute the word Keltic, the result would be a striking testimony to the value of his evidence.'

Briefly, the author's theory is that what is called Anglo-Saxon should be called Kelto-Saxon and that the word *Angle* is a corruption of *An Gael*, or, the Gael, which reminds one of those guileless 'lost tribe' enthusiasts who explain *Saxon* as an aphetic form of *Isaacson*! 'When the Kelts left their original home to spread over Libya and Europe, they called the forsaken continent *As-ia*, or the back country, from the Gaelic *as*, back, and *ia* (now obsolete), a country.' One is grateful for the 'now obsolete'. Keltic being the indubitable predecessor both of the Greek and Latin, its traces can be found in all languages, e.g. *mosque*, which the ignorant suppose to be Arabic, is really Gaelic *mosqail*, watch, while the etymology of *fellow* from Gaelic *balaoch*, a young herdsman, is supported by

the fact that 'in Egypt the peasants or tillers of the soil are called *fellahs*, which is probably from the same ancient root'. Keltic even seems to have got as far as Java, for the deadly *upas-tree*,¹ commonly derived from Malay *upas*, poison, is really the Gaelic *umhas*, horrible.

Our lexicographer believes in fair play. He always records the accepted erroneous etymology before giving the true Gaelic derivation, e.g. under *grog*, 'This word is commonly supposed to have been first used by the sailors in Admiral Vernon's fleet, in the reign of George II, because the admiral was popularly known as Old Grogram or Old Grog, from the grogram suit which he usually wore in bad weather, and because he was supposed to be the first to order an allowance of spirits and water to his crew. For this tradition, however, there is no adequate authority.'² The true derivation of the word is the Gaelic *croc*, a horn, a drinking-cup.' So also the tradition that *negus* was first brewed in Queen Anne's time by Colonel Negus appears to be as unfounded as that of the origin of *grog*—'It is possible that the name was in the old deep-drinking days given in contempt to a weaker mixture by some sturdy toper who preferred his wine without water, and that it is traceable to the Gaelic *neo-aogas*, unseemly, improper, unfit.' 'Eaves-

¹ The *upas-tree* superstition dates from Erasmus Darwin's *Loves of the Plants* (1789)—

Fierce in dread silence on the blasted heath

Fell *upas* sits, the Hydra-tree of death.

² Vernon's order, dated Aug., 1746, is still extant at the Admiralty (Oxford Dict.).

dropper, hitherto supposed to be derived from the *eaves* of a cottage, under which a spy stationed himself to peer in at the window to hear what is said inside, is really Gaelic *uibhir*, a quantity, a number, *druapeir*, a tippler who indulges in small but frequent drops: whence *eaves-dropper*, one who acquires information by a number of small drops or driblets.' ' *Taradiddle*, a small untruth, comes from Gaelic *tair*, mean, paltry, and *didil*, the act of peeping and the information thus obtained, which is therefore very likely to be incorrect.' Even the gods and heroes of Greek mythology bear obviously Keltic names. 'The name of *Ulysses* seems to be derived from his many journeys upon the waters—Gaelic *uile*, all, *uisgue*, water, while the Greek form *Odysseus* is traceable to the hospitalities he received—Gaelic *aoidh*, hospitality, *uisgue*, water.'

It is in the apparently meaningless refrains of popular songs that Dr. Mackay finds the surest proof of the Gaelic origin of our language—'An equally remarkable proof of the almost imperishable vitality of the Gaelic, surviving in forms of speech, among various nations, without attracting the smallest suspicion on the part of the learned as to the meaning that the words were ever intended to convey, may be found in the choruses, supposed to be mere gibberish, of the popular songs of the English, the Scotch, the Irish, the Welsh, and the French. The Fal, la, la, the Tra, la, la, the Fa, lero, loo, the Tooral, looral, the Derry down, derry down, the Tire lire, and other apparently absurd collections of syllables that do duty in hundreds

of widely different songs and ballads . . . are all relics of the once solemn worship by the Druids of the Sun and the heavenly bodies. The hymns once sung by thousands of deep-voiced priests marching in solemn procession from their mystic Circles or Aachorus to salute with music and song and reverential homage the rising of the glorious orb which cheers and fertilizes the world, the gift as well as the emblem of Almighty Power and Almighty Love, have wholly departed from the recollection of men, and these poor dishonoured relics are spoken of by scholars and philosophers as tosh, gibberish, nonsense, and an idle farrago of sounds, of no more philological value than the lowing of cattle or the bleating of sheep.' He is not even baffled by the *Lilliburlero*¹ which Uncle Toby was so fond of whistling. For the Keltic scholar these mysterious syllables resolve themselves into *Li ! li ! beur ! lear-a ! buille na là*, which signifies 'Light ! light ! on the sea ! Beyond the promontory ! 'Tis the stroke (or dawn) of the day.'—'Like all the choruses previously cited, these words are part of a hymn to the rising sun !'

The Celtic superstition is ineradicable. I have lately received, by the courtesy of the author, the joyous work of Monsieur Oscar Vignon. The intriguing title, *Mystifications Historiques, Philologiques, Philobochiques*, Hoch ! Moch ! Boch ! of this book, already in its fifteenth thousand (no such luck for the humble plodder !), suggests that the

¹ Written by Lord Wharton and set to a quick-step by Purcell.

author is not too serious. In fact it is hard to say whether he is patriotically bent on proving the French language to be of Celtic origin or whether he is spoofing his readers. Unlike the writers already mentioned in this chapter, M. Vignon is a scholar, a linguist and a humorist. I hope he will pardon me if I quote him very briefly and refer any interested Celtophil to the original. His indignation is excited by the fact that, in an edition of Cæsar's Commentaries by a 'comité de professeurs', the Gauls are rendered as *Barbares*—'et cette ignominieuse énormité n'a jamais frappé les membres du Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation soi-disant Nationale, ni aucun des Grands Maîtres de l'Université qui font la fine jambe rue de Grenelle. Ni, ce qui me surprend le plus, aucun des professeurs de cette sanglante Université, ni aucun des élèves qui ingurgitent ce poison. Quels sont les cochons malades que la Grande Maison française a recrutés pour baver, dans nos écoles, sur nos ancêtres? Pas des Français sûrement.' Convinced that Latin 'est la fille du gaulois, et c'est ce qui explique sa grâce, sa force, et sa gloire', M. Vignon is naturally hostile to 'cette aberration continue, cette manie d'ignorer, de nier, les lumières les plus éclatantes de la langue gauloise pour recourir aux obscurités du sanscrit, du latin, du grec, du germanique'. It is interesting to note that he regards a knowledge of English 'à fond et dans les coins' as essential to the equipment of the etymologist, and that the *Angli* were really the old Gauls—Hen-Galli, Hen-G-Li, Hen-Gli. Even the characteristic

word *lord* is really of Celtic origin—‘*Lord* est mal dit ; c’est *Milor* qu’il faut dire, étymologiquement, et c’est ainsi que nos campagnards nomment un lord : un gros milor. Le milaour, milor, est un guerrier, pour milagour. . . . Comment s’est donc produite l’abréviation de *milour*, *milor*, en *lor*, *lord* ? C’est là la scission fautive de *milor* en *my lor* qui a causé cette erreur, le peuple ayant pris le *mi* pour le pronom possessif *my*, mon : on a mal découpé le mot. . . . Et voilà comme on oublie jusqu’à la signification de son titre et de son nom quand on répudie son origine, la plus noble, la celtique, pour la plus abjecte,—la germanique !’

M. Vignon is decidedly up to date in his subject matter. Noting that ‘Hitler porte un nom archiconnu comme celtique, gaulois’, and that ‘*Heil* est un vivat des Gaulois’, he continues that the *Führer* ‘est en train de stériliser les physiquement indésirables de ses compatriotes ; ce qui prouve qu’il y en a. S’il avait l’inspiration de stériliser aussi les imbéciles, quel débarras pour le monde entier ; car il ne resterait plus un seul Boche bochifiant sur la planète.’ From which it may be gathered that the Diversions of M. Vignon, like the Diversions of Purley, are not untinged with political feeling.

CHAPTER x

THE ANGLO-INDIANS

IN reading Mr. Kipling's *Kim* for the third time, an example to be commended to all wise people, I was struck by two facts in connection with the large number of Hindustani words that occur in the narrative. In the first place there were many on which I should have liked more enlightenment than the author vouchsafes, but in the second place I realized how many words of this class are no longer italicized or explained and are now so familiar that we hardly realize that to the 17th century they would have been largely gibberish.

The Anglo-Indian element in modern English is really considerable. The process of introduction has been gradual. It began with the merchant venturers of the 16th century, was continued by the East India Company officials of the 17th, who developed into the 'nabobs' of the 18th, and has been going on steadily ever since. The words introduced are of the most various origins, for India has many languages,¹ and what we vaguely call Hindustani is not, strictly speaking, a language, but rather a polyglot jargon used as a lingua

¹ About 170, belonging to many quite unrelated groups.

franca. It is also known as Urdu or Oordoo, from a Turki word for army or camp, which is the ultimate source of our *horde*, originally applied in the European languages to a wandering tribe of Tartars. Urdu contains a number of words from those Indian languages which can be traced back to Sanskrit and also a considerable Persian element, but is also strongly impregnated with non-Aryan languages, such as Mongolian, Arabic, Malay, which have no affinity with those of Europe. From all of these could be quoted words which are now as familiar in English as if they dated from Hengist and Horsa, while even the less familiar are a very present help to the crossword-setter. Some words preserve their foreign flavour, e.g. *fakir* at once calls up the picture of an Indian religious mendicant. It is Arabic for poor, and thus synonymous with the Persian *dervish*. On the other hand, *chukka*, a period at *polo*¹ (from the Sanskrit word for circle), is being rapidly acclimatized as *chukker* or *chucker*. The earliest examples we come across are naturally trade-words, e.g. *pepper* and *sugar*, which reached us in almost pre-historic times by very circuitous routes. Both words can be traced in Sanskrit, and from the Greek cognate of *sugar* we get *saccharine*. Another variant is *jaggery*, coarse brown sugar, which reached us via Malay and Portuguese. Most of us would connect *calico* with Calicut, but not everybody knows that *chintz* is the plural of *chint* and goes back to the same Sanskrit word, meaning

¹ *Polo* is the Balti name of the ball with which the game is played.

speckled, to which we owe the *cheetah*, hunting leopard, and *chit*, a note or a character written for a servant, put down in 'black and white'. *Gingham* suggests English middle-class respectability, but is a Malay word meaning striped. The *dungaree* of the sailor-man is the name of a village near Bombay. In *tea-caddy* we have Malay *kati*, a weight of $1\frac{1}{3}$ lb.; *candy* comes via Persian from a Sanskrit word for piece, and *cheroot* is Tamil for a roll (of tobacco).

But there are many words for which the stay-at-home Englishman would hardly conjecture an Oriental origin. I must confess, to my shame, that for many years I believed *toddy* to be Scotch, whereas it is the name of a palm from which *arrack* (whence the obsolete *rack-punch*) is obtained. The latter word is Arabic for sweat, applied metaphorically to the exuding sap. *Punch* is named from its 'five' ingredients; cf. *Punjaub*, five rivers. *Bungalows* are now so common that we are apt to forget their origin from *bangla*, i.e. Bengalee, and the exotic origin of *pyjamas*, leg-clothing, is hardly realized. The American form *pajamas* is nearer the Persian original. No English baby had a *cot* before the Anglo-Indians adopted the word and brought it home in the East Indiamen. It was a nautical word long before it reached the nursery. It was probably one of those *nabobs*, rather unkindly described by Macaulay, who first thought of helping the local church by means of a *bazaar*, a Persian word for market. This institution is now often superseded by a *gymkhana*, probably a cor-

ruption, due to some vague association with *gymnastics*, of *gend-khana*, ball-place, racket-court.

I have referred above to the *nabobs*, a name rather derisively applied¹ to those predecessors and contemporaries of Jos Sedley who had successfully 'shaken the pagoda-tree'. It is more properly *nawab*, an Arabic name for a governor under the *Great Mogul*, i.e. the Great Mongol, a title first borne (15th century) by Baber, a descendant of the conqueror Tamerlane or Timour the Tartar. *Rajah* comes from the Sanskrit word for king and is cognate with Lat. *rex*, as the feminine *ranee* is with *regina*. *Rajpoot* is literally king's son. In *maharajah* we have the cognate of Lat. *magnus*, as also in *mahatma*, great soul, and *mahout*, high officer. *Sahib*, Arabic for friend, was formerly an Indian title, borne by the great Tippoo and the infamous Nana, but is now usually applied to Europeans. In *mem sahib*, European lady, it is curiously juxtaposed with Mary Ann's *m'm*. *Sirdar* is Persian and means holding head. It is related to *sirkar*, head-work, a name sometimes given to the English *raj* or rule. The same suffix as in *sirdar* appears in *havildar*, sergeant, *ressaldar*, captain, *chokidar*, watchman. There is said² to be in India a tombstone to the memory of an English chaplain who was murdered 'by his own *chokidar*', with the oddly chosen text, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant'.

¹ This name was popularized by Foote's comedy, *The Nabob* (1773).

² The true facts have been elaborated by Benvenuto.

It is natural that most of our words borrowed in this way should be substantives, but there are also a few adjectives, the most familiar to contemporary ears being *cushy* (see p. 161). The earliest adopted was perhaps *pucka* or *pukka*, lit. ripe, cooked, and hence serviceable, permanent, etc., applied to buildings. It was popularized by Sir George Trevelyan in *The Dawk Bungalow*, or, *Is his Appointment Pucka?* This work and the same author's *Letters of a Competition-Walla* did much to familiarize the reading public with Anglo-Indian terms. The name *competition-wallah* was invented for members of the Civil Service who entered by the competitive system introduced in 1865, *-walla* being an adjectival suffix attached to nouns. One of the earliest verbs borrowed is *shampoo*, originally applied to a form of massage; it is the imperative of a verb meaning to knead. We have also made *salaam* into a verb; it is the Arabic for peace, used as a word of salutation, and identical with *Salem*. Familiar kitchen words are *curry*, from Tamil *kari*, sauce, and *kedgerree*, which we wrongly use of yesterday's fish warmed up for breakfast, its original sense being a mess of rice; there are 15th-century references to its use as food for elephants. *Mulligatawny* is Tamil for pepper-water. *Tamarind* is the Arabic *tamr*, ripe date, of *Hind*, i.e. India. With the obsolescent *brandy-pawnee*, from *pani*, water, cf. *belaittee-pani*,¹ used in Kim for soda-water.

Military words are perhaps the most numerous.

¹ See *blighty* (p. 183).

Sepoy reached us via Portuguese. It is from a Persian adjective meaning military and appears also in Fr. *spahi*. *Loot* began to be popular about the middle of the 19th century. Lord Malmesbury used it in 1847 in reference to Marshal Soult's collection of Spanish pictures.¹ *Mufti*, obsolescent for civilian dress, originally an Arabic name for an expounder of the Mohammedan law, is rather a puzzle. It has been suggested that the off-duty costume of the 19th-century officer, flowered dressing-gown and fanciful smoking-cap, was suggestive of a stage *mufti*. Perhaps a better clue is supplied by Midshipman Easy's query, 'Who is the fellow in mufti?' and his friend Gascoigne's reply, 'That is the *mufti*, Jack, in other words, the chaplain.' If this is right, *mufti* must have been used at some time in the services as *padre* is now. The latter word was taken to India by the Portuguese, adopted by the 'natives' in the sense of priest, and then re-adopted by Mr. Atkins, so that its travels have been extensive. The historic *pandy*, the soldiers' word for the mutineers of 1857, is the personal name Pande, very common among high-caste sepoys of the Bengal army. One of the name started a mutiny by shooting an officer at Barrackpur (March 29, 1857). From the Mutiny dates the *puggaree*, properly *pagri*, turban, commonly worn in hot weather in England sixty years ago. More modern are *dum-dum*, from an arsenal near Cal-

¹ The Daily Telegraph for April 22, 1935, announces the sale of a Murillo captured among King Joseph's baggage after the battle of Vittoria (1813).

cutta, *puttee*, lit. bandage, which is ultimately Sanskrit, and *khaki*, from Persian *khak*, earth, dust. *Dixie*, mess-tin, is a diminutive of Persian *dig*, pot.

Many other words, unfamiliar to the civilian, are used by the soldier. The other day I heard the word *buckshee* from a bus-driver, who would probably call a rifle a *bandook* or *bundook*, from the Arabic word for a crossbow, and describe tea as *chah*, the Portuguese having introduced the Cantonese form of the word, *cha*, into Hindustani. *Buckshee* is a perversion of *backsheesh*, originally Persian for a present and inevitably one of the first Oriental words acquired by the merchant venturers. No word of this type has been more discussed than *blighty*, which is the Hindustani *bilayati* from Arabic *wilayat*,¹ inhabited country, dominion, but, in Hindustani, especially foreign country, and applied by soldiers to England, home. The German equivalent of 'blighty wound', one that meant a return to England, was *heimatsschuss*, home-shot.

The Indian voyage gave us a number of nautical terms, such as *monsoon*, from Arabic *mausim*, season, and *typhoon*, from Arabic *tufan*, which is, however, possibly borrowed from Greek. *Lascar*, used of an East Indian sailor, was originally a soldier belonging to a Persian *lashkar*, camp or army. The relation of this word to the Arabic

¹ In Kim *belait* is used for Europe. Found also as *vilayet*, Turkish province. The origin of the word is Arabic *wali*, governor.

askar, army, whence the *askari*, or fighting-men, of West Africa, is uncertain. *Serang*, Lascar boat-swain, is Persian for an overseer. *Dinghy*, lit. trough, is a name for a river boat in Bengal.

Many Anglo-Indian words do not originally belong to the East. The Portuguese were there before us and some of their words, adopted by the natives (see *padre*, p. 182), have come back to Europe in disguise. Long before our familiar *tank* became metallic, it was applied (c. 1600) to a reservoir in India. It is probably Portuguese *tanque*, from Lat. *stagnum*, pool. *Caste* is the Portuguese *casta*, lineage, apparently from Lat. *casta*, pure, and *cobra* is the Portuguese for a snake, from Lat. *coluber*. From the same language come *ayah*, a nurse, and *bayadere*, a dancing-girl, which is cognate with our *ball* and *ballet*. The use by our early venturers of the word *factory*, in the sense of a trading-station, is due to Portuguese *feitoria*, defined by Vieyra's Dictionary (1794) as a 'house or district inhabited by traders in a distant country'. *Sjambok*, now a South African word, was taken thither from India by the Portuguese, who spelt it *chabuco*. Its earlier English form was *chawbuck*, as in Scott's *Surgeon's Daughter*, and it is of Persian origin. Another South African word, *kraal*, is Portuguese *curral*, corresponding to Spanish *corral*. With these travelled Portuguese words we may compare *tiffin*, lunch, for *tiffing*, 'eating or drinking out of meal time' (Grose, *Slang Dictionary*, 1785), which is an English dialect word much older than the appearance of *tiffin* in India.

In the case of some Hindustani words of *Aryan*¹ origin it is possible to trace a relationship with European words. In *darbar*, court, of Persian origin, the first syllable means, and is cognate with, our *door*. The *deodar*, or Himalayan cedar, means divine tree and is cognate with Lat. *deus*, while the *peepul*, the great fig-tree which is the meeting-place of the villagers, is related to the *poplar*, which it resembles in the tremor of its leaves. Here may be mentioned, out of place, the most famous of Indian trees, the *banian* or *banyan*. Almost the first piece of botanical erudition I remember acquiring, presumably from The Child's Guide to Knowledge, was connected with this gigantic fig-tree, the branches of which hang down to the ground and take root so as to form a kind of grove. The English adoption of this name was accidental and due to the fact that a company of *banians*, Indian traders, had established themselves, as early as the 17th century, under a particularly fine specimen at Gomhroon, on the Persian Gulf. These people have an exaggerated respect for animal life, hence *banyan days*, those on which no meat ration was served, in the Navy. In *cummerbund*, Persian for loin-band, the last syllable is cognate with our *bind*, while the first syllable of *punkah* is cognate with our *fan*. *Zenana* or *zanana* contains the Persian *zan*, woman, one of the key-words of the Aryan languages ; among its cognates are Gr.

¹ i.e. belonging to the Indo-European group, of which the chief Asiatic representatives are Persian (now saturated with the unrelated Arabic) and Sanskrit.

γυνή, Eng. *quean* and *queen*, and Gaelic *ben* (in *banshee*). In *The Light that Failed* there is a fat war-correspondent nicknamed the *nilgai*, blue cow, the first syllable of which appears in the *a-nil-ine* dyes, while the second is cognate with *cow*; cf. *Gaikwar*, also spelt *Guicowar*, a Marathi title which means cow-keeper, with reference to the sacred character of the animal.

It is natural that many words thus adopted orally should have been corrupted or misunderstood. The *cheese*, meaning the correct thing, is Hindustani *chiz*, thing. The less cultivated *choky*, prison, is for *chauki*, police-station, whence *chaukidar*, *chokidar*, originally rural constable; and *first-chop* preserves *chhap*, a stamp or brand, which probably went to China on its way to England. With these slang words may be compared *gup*, gossip, and the curious recent adoption in America¹ of *thug* for a murderous ruffian. The material called *kerseymere* is a corruption of *cashmere*, due to confusion with another material called *kersey*, which Skeat traces to Kersey in Suffolk. From *chickee*, a sum of four rupees, really a *sequin*, we have the old card-game called *chicken-hazard*. The *grasscut* or *grass-cutter*, whose duty it is to see to the forage of the horses, seems to be our ingenious perversion of *ghaskat*, *ghaskata*, the Hindustani name for the same functionary. The *solar topee*, or sun-hat, is probably regarded by some people as a defence against 'solar' rays, but the correct form is *sola*,

¹ But the Oxford Dictionary has a quotation as early as 1839 from Carlyle.

the name of a plant of which the pith is used for this purpose. The *chapati*, or unleavened cake, which became historical with the Mutiny, is, in its anglicized form, *chupatty*, inevitably associated with our *patty*. *Amok*, used of a kind of nervous frenzy among the Malays, is made into *amuck* and sometimes treated as two words, e.g. Dryden writes of Burnet—

Frontless and satire-proof, he scours the streets,
And runs an Indian muck at all he meets.

(Hind and Panther, iii. 1188.)

Teapoy,¹ a small three-legged table, has been altered, under the influence of *tea*, from an original which is ultimately identical with 'tripod', while a *charpoy*, or light bedstead, is etymologically a 'quadruped'. The walking-stick called a *Penang lawyer*, 'supposed to be so-called from its usefulness in settling disputes in Penang' (Gilmore, Among the Mongols), is thought to be a corruption of Malay *pinang layor*, fire-dried areca, the island having been named from its characteristic product. Just as the Malay *gadong*, a store-house, is corrupted into *godown*, so *kampung*, an enclosure, becomes *compound*, which one novelist, eager for local colour, has further transmogrified—'When the rebellion broke out at other stations in India, I left our own compost.' This blunder was surpassed by the newspaper which, referring to the *nuzzer*, or ceremonial present, offered to Queen Victoria by Sir Salar Jung, recorded that the Indian noble 'offered his

¹ The second syllable is identical with the first syllable of *pyjamas*.

muggur (broad-nosed crocodile!) as a token of allegiance, which Her Majesty touched and returned'. Still greater was the mental haziness of the novelist who, confusing the *lama* of Tibet with the South American quadruped called a *llama*, wrote that 'The landlord prostrated himself as reverently, if not as lowly, as a Peruvian before his Grand Llama'.

The above corruptions and misunderstandings suggest a brief excursus on the *damn* which some people do or do not care. The Oxford Dictionary, with its usual caution, dismisses the theory, first formulated in 1803, that *damn* is here for *dam*, a minute Indian money of account, but I believe that a very fair case can be made out for this etymology. If the reader will consider the usage of the languages he is familiar with, he will recognize that expressions of this kind always deal with worthless objects or with trifling coins and sums. In English we don't care a button, a straw, two pins, etc.; or we don't care a brass farthing, a halfpenny or twopence. Sometimes even we rise to sixpence. At any rate I have heard the larger sum used in this way by an Irish politician, who inevitably described it as a 'brass sixpence'. Similar sets of words are found in all languages I have dabbled in, ancient and modern, and I do not know of any parallel to 'caring a damn', except 'caring a hang',¹ which is merely euphemistic for the stronger expression. 'Caring a curse'

¹ Quite modern and American is 'a hoot in Hades' or 'two hoots in hell'.

may also be a weakening of the original or may even represent the middle English *kers*, i.e. cress, thus used in *Piers Plowman* and Chaucer. The expression to 'care a damn' became sanctified, if one may so speak, by the authority of that great Anglo-Indian, the Duke of Wellington, whose *two-penny damn*, 'that oath so disproportioned to the greatness of its author' (Trevelyan), seems to preserve some hazy reminiscence of an original pecuniary element.

As will have been noticed, the Anglo-Indian contribution to modern English is essentially materialistic, except for a few words which have become familiar in connection with theosophy, e.g. *avatar* and *nirvana*, Sanskrit words for incarnation and extinction, or *yogi*, one who by meditation and concentration tries to attain to *yoga*, union (with the Supreme Being), which is cognate with our *yoke*, Lat. *jugum*, etc. There are, however, two words which are used imaginatively, and erroneously, in a metaphorical sense. The Press seldom lets a week pass without some reference to the *juggernaut* of capitalism, militarism, industrialism, bolshevism, or some other *-ism* regarded as an awful and irresistible power destroying victims wholesale. *Juggernaut*, Sanskrit for Lord of the Universe, is an epithet of Krishna worshipped as Vishnu. There does not appear to be any authentic record of pilgrims casting themselves *en masse* under the wheels of the chariot in which the idol is dragged through the streets of Orissa, though lunatics and people suffering from incurable diseases may have

occasionally chosen this end to their existence.¹ The *pariahs* are a low, but by no means lowest, caste. They engage in menial work and have some unpleasant habits, but they are not outcasts, and the word is unknown to natives of India in the mistaken European sense, which dates from Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's sentimental tale, *La Châumière Indienne* (1790). The conventional use of both of the above words is due to ignorance—an ignorance hardly so great as that of the M.P., who, reading of the *dhoolies* or *doolies* used for removing the wounded from the battle-field, announced in the House that 'the ferocious Doolies rushed from the hills and carried off the wounded soldiers'.

¹ 'Juggernaut is very ugly, but the most humane of gods and never kills anybody except by accident' (Lt. Tipping).

CHAPTER XI

THE PLACE-NAME SOCIETY

SOME years ago I contributed to the, now unfortunately defunct, *Edinburgh Review* an article ¹ on the Study of Place-Names which was inspired by the appearance of the preliminary volumes of the English Place-Name Society. Since then much has happened. A series of county volumes, each surpassing its predecessors in fullness and excellence, have been issued by the Society. At the moment of writing the following have appeared—Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire, Worcestershire, the North Riding of Yorkshire, Sussex (2 vols.), Devonshire (2 vols.), Northamptonshire, Surrey, to which, by the time these lines are in print, will be added Essex. All of these, except the North Riding, by Dr. A. H. Smith, are the work of Professors Allen Mawer and F. M. Stenton, with the assistance, for some counties, of other editors specially qualified to deal with the region in question. Every volume is packed with an amount of philological, historical and antiquarian information sufficient to supply matter for a dozen essays on this fascinating subject.

¹ Reprinted in my *Adjectives, and Other Words* (John Murray, 1930).

The intelligent layman's interest in individual volumes will probably vary in proportion with their handling of ground familiar to him. To the Londoner fond of straying into the lovely Chilterns and the still extensive beech-woods of Buckinghamshire, no region will have more appeal than this oddly shaped county, of which the south belongs to the Thames valley, while the north runs right into the Midlands. The geography of the county is reflected in its place-names, e.g. in the north we find the Anglian *Calverton*, in the south the Saxon *Chalvey*, both derived from *cealf*, calf. The Vale of Aylesbury still had something of a British population in the 6th century, and a few British place-names survive in the county, often in that reduplicated form in which an English explanation is added to the Celtic word, e.g. *Chetwode* means 'wood-wood' and *Brill*, earlier *Bruhll*, etc., means 'hill-hill'. *Chiltern*, like most of our hill names, is no doubt of pre-English origin. Traces of the Norsemen survive in *Skirmett*, from *scir-gemot*, meeting-place of the shire, and *Fingest* is for *thing*¹-*hyrst*, the hurst, or wooded knoll, of assembly. The older spellings of *Owlswick*, unconnected with owls, show a hesitation between the native name Wulf and the corresponding old Norse Ulfr.

As in all counties, we find a certain number of feudal names of Norman origin, e.g. Drayton Beauchamp, Milton Keynes, Newport Pagnell, Stoke Mandeville, etc., and *Mantle's Green* is the last trace

¹ This sense of *thing* survives in the *Storting*, Norwegian Parliament, lit. Strong Thing.

of the famous Turstin Mantel's holding in Amersham, as recorded in Domesday Book. *Chenies* was Isenhamstede or Isenhamtone in the 12th century, but from the 13th century onward is associated with the Cheyne family, the original place-name having apparently dropped out in the days of Henry VIII. *Farnham Royal* was Farnham Verdon in the 14th century, but the Verdons held their land 'by the grand serjeanty of supporting the King's right arm at his coronation': hence the *Royal*.

In Buckinghamshire toponymy, as elsewhere, things are not always, in fact are seldom, what they seem: *Pitstone* was once Picel's thorn, *Grandborough* means green hill, *Spinfield* took its name from Nicholas de Espineville (perhaps now Épinonville, Meuse), who held land at Great Marlow in 1230, and *Hardmead* was once the 'mead' of Herewulf or Herewald. *Boarstall* has nothing to do with boars; it is a variant of the common dialect *borstal*, steep path up a hill, especially frequent in Kent, and now chiefly associated with a place near Rochester where was established, in 1902, the first house of detention for 'juvenile adult' offenders.

The area now represented by Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire forms a geographical, rather than an historical, unit; it is, roughly speaking, the basin of the Ouse, and, in this connection, it is curious to note that this river, or one stretch of it, must at some time have been called the Thames. *Tempsford* (Beds), at the junction of the Ouse and

Ivel, was in Anglo-Saxon times Tæmesford. It was there that Earl Toli was killed in 921, the author of the *Historia Eliensis* describing the locality as 'apud Tamensem fluvium'.

The most interesting pages to many readers will be those that deal with the great road names—Akeman Street, Ermine Street, Watling Street and the Icknield Way. The last of these alone is of purely British origin, bearing a name that must have been given to an old track-way long before the first Roman 'street' was constructed. Its ultimate origin is a matter for that kind of guess-work which is rigidly excluded from the publications of the Society. Scandinavian names are poorly represented in the region, though we have a *lund*, or sacred grove, surviving in a corrupted form in *Holland Wood* (Hunts), and a trace of the gathering called a *thing* in *Tingreth* (Beds). This is for Anglo-Saxon *thing rith*, assembly brook, and marks the meeting-place of the *Manshead* Hundred.

The origin of many place-names in *-head* is curious. In the first volume of *Essays and Studies* by Members of the English Association (1910) Henry Bradley suggested that such names, e.g. *Gateshead* (goat's), *Shepshed*, *Manshead*, etc., were due to the 'custom of setting up a head, or a representation of it, on a pole to mark the place for public open-air meetings'. To Volume XI of the Place-Name Society's publications, that on Surrey, Professor Bruce Dickins contributes a learned note which argues strongly for the theory that 'the place they (the *-head* names) indicate was once the

site of bloody sacrifice, in which the *heafod*, human or animal, was offered to a heathen deity'.

Most districts have their characteristic suffixes. Here we find a fair proportion of *-hams* and *-tons*, very few *-thorps* and not a single *-stoke*; but we are in the very focus of the *-hoes*, from Anglo-Saxon *hoh*, a spur of a hill-side, literally a heel. Besides the numerous place-names ending with this syllable, such as Bletsoe, Faldo, Southoe, etc., there are many spots and farms called simply *The Hoo*. Sometimes we find that the same colloquial pronunciation what makes *widow* into *widder* or *widdy*, has altered the sound and appearance of these place-names, e.g. *Calpher Wood* (Hunts) was once *calf hoe*, and the deceptive-looking *Kidney Wood* (Beds) is a perversion of Anglo-Saxon *cytan hoh*, kite's hoe. Among the rare feudal names found in the area are *Higham Gobion* and *Leighton Buzzard*, the high home of the Gobion family and the kitchen garden (*leek town*) of the house of Buzzard. The former was colloquially degraded in the 16th century to Higham Gubbins, and the latter artificially dignified to Leighton Beaudesert.

In dealing with Worcestershire, the plum county, it is especially appropriate to adopt the method of little Jack Horner. Opening at random we find in Doddingtree Hundred a farm called *Deaseland*. In 1275 it was Detheslond, probably so named many centuries earlier because haunted by a departed spirit. The farm-buildings must have been renewed many times in the interval, but names are almost

immortal. *Doddington* Hundred naturally excites our curiosity. We look back a few pages and find that a meeting-place of the 'hundred' was at a tree named from one Dudda. We are referred, as a parallel, to the extinct 'hundred' of *Wimburntree*, from the tree belonging to a lady called Wynburh. This naturally makes us think about trees and the part that has been played in the map of England by oak and ash and thorn, so we turn to a note towards the end of the volume and find, quoted from the Anglo-Saxon charters, various oaks described as famous, tall, rough, black, boundary, ivy-mantled, down-bent, crooked, and marked with a cross.

Wimburntree Hundred was absorbed in 1135 into the still existing *Oswaldslow* Hundred. The latter name, *Oswaldes hlaw* in 977, now survives as *Low Hill* on the Worcester-Evesham road, a deceptive name which really means 'hill hill'. This is also the meaning, in the same hundred, of *Churchill*, of which the first element is not *church*, but the Ancient British *cruc*, a hill, to which the Anglo-Saxons added their own synonym. *Crookbarrow Hill* contains the same old word and means 'hill hill hill'.

Worcestershire is altogether, as we should expect from its position and its late Anglo-Saxon settlement, rich in Ancient British names. One of the most interesting is *Malvern*, which Professor Ekwall interprets as Welsh *moel bryn*, bare hill. This is, scientifically, an improvement on William of Malmesbury's 'lucus a non lucendo' etymology of the Monastery of Great Malvern—'Non enim ibi *male*, sed bene et pulcherrimo religio *vern*at.'

Someone ought to collect the fantasies of the old topographers. The medieval writers are poetically refreshing. By the 17th century they often become comic, e.g. Thomas Habington, explaining *Bedwardine* (i.e. Bede's enclosure), writes: 'So called it may be from bedds or lodgings in a warde, or of the ward or warden of beades and devotion.'

Dipping again, we come across *Wyatt's Copse*. In the 13th century this was part of a farm belonging to John Wyard. As a contrast to this continuity of association between a name and a place let us take *Rous Lench*, in which *Lench* probably means ledge or ridge. In Domesday Book this was Bishop's Lench, in 1167 Lench Randolph, in 1445 and since Rous Lench. It was held by the Bishop of Worcester, then by a Randolph and finally by the Rous family. On the map the yeoman scores nearly every time over his feudal superior. *Drinkers End* still commemorates a family that bore this pleasing nickname in the 13th century.

The Anglo-Saxon was a realist. He named his homestead or clearing from himself, from prominent natural features, or from the crops and animals for which the soil proved favourable. The Norman, however, having some sort of eye for a landscape, sprinkled the country with Beauchamps, Beaulieus, etc. *Beaulieu* in Hants is pronounced Bewley. The same place-name in Worcestershire has become afflicted with a parasitic *d* and is now *Bewdley*, 'worthily so called for the beautiful site thereof' (Camden).

When Sir Jasper's corpse is discovered in the library, we know that the Satanic aspect of the

South American secretary is merely the author's guileful device for diverting our suspicions from the churchwarden. So also, when we come across *Cinders Wood*, we feel sure that it is unconnected with combustion and really comes, as early records show, from *sunder*, i.e. apart. *Redmarley* has obviously no connection with red marl, it is a 'ley' by a 'reedy mere'. *Headless Cross* may in the course of the centuries have lost its head, but it stood in the 13th century on a 'heath-ley' and was named accordingly. *Rashwood*, for Ashwood, earlier Ash-hide, i.e. an estate of one 'hide' on which ash-trees grew, and *Nurton's Farm* for Overton, contrasted with an adjacent Netherton, exemplify familiar phonetic contortions.

Despite the learned labours of Professor Mawer and his confederates much still remains to be done. It is especially, as is only natural, the most ancient towns that offer the toughest problems to the investigator. The origin of *Worcester* itself is still uncertain. *Evesham* is traditionally derived from one Eof, a shepherd to whom the Virgin Mary appeared in a vision in the 9th century, but this same Eof labours under sore suspicion of being no better than a 'back-formation' from the name of the town. *Kidderminster* may have been the minster of one Cydda, but who was he? A man important enough to have a minster named from him should surely have left some record of himself in national or local history.

The chief characteristics of the North Riding of

Yorkshire are an almost complete absence of British names, a strong Anglian element due to the settlement of the invaders in the 6th century, an equally strong Scandinavian element dating from the partial conquest effected by the Danes in the 9th century, and a new Scandinavian layer superimposed by Norwegian intruders coming over the Pennines, who had sojourned in Ireland long enough to adopt a number of Gaelic words and names, and who probably brought some Irishmen with them. The effects of the Scandinavian settlement of Yorkshire were manifold. The country was divided into Scandinavian ridings,¹ the ridings were divided into Scandinavian wapentakes (instead of Anglo-Saxon hundreds), and the Vikings set up meeting-places for their own 'things' on such sites as Thingwall.² A good example of Norwegian-Irish nomenclature is the deceptive-looking *Airyholme*, which, in the 12th century, was Erghum, the dative plural of a word adopted from Old Irish *airgh*, a place for summer pastures in the mountains, very common in Lancashire names such as *Mansergh*, *Docker*, etc. It appears also in *Coldman Argos*, the pastures of an Irishman named Colman, i.e. Columban.

In this region it is natural to find characteristic north-country name-elements. The commonest are

¹ As a small boy, I always wondered why there was not a South Riding. Nobody explained to me that a *riding* was formerly a *thriding*, third part.

² The site is now unknown. The etymology is *thingvollr*, place of assembly, and the same place-name occurs in Lancashire and Cheshire. Cf. also *Dingwall* (Ross) and see *Fingest* (p. 192).

-by and -thorp, the numerical superiority of the former being due to the nature of the Danish immigration, which resulted rather in the isolated farmstead than in the clustered settlement. *Becks* and *dales* are numerous, *William Beck* still bearing the name of a 12th-century William, while *Whisperdales* was at about the same date White Spot Dale. *Garth*, corresponding to the southern *yard*, is somewhat disguised in *Hawsker*, the enclosure of a Norseman named Haukr. *Thwaite*, parcel of land, paddock, is well represented, but not so frequently as in the Lake country; it is well concealed in *Garfit* (for *garth-thwaite*). In *Scrathow*, we have *how*, a hill, combined with the name of the Old Norse goblin who has become *Old Scratch*. *Fingay Hill* is pleonastic for *thing how*. *Sutherland*, which looks very simple, is for *Souter lund*, the shoemaker's grove. Two very characteristic northern elements are *wath*, a ford, and *with*, a wood. The first is unrecognizable in *Smallways* (for -*waths*), while in *Lockwood*, the enclosed plantation, the native *wood* has now replaced the Scandinavian word. From all of which it is clear that to interpret place-names by their modern forms is asking for trouble.

The above examples also show that the people who were responsible for the toponymy of the North Riding spoke a language which would have been unintelligible to the southerner. Even now a Yorkshire rustic and a Sussex downsman would have difficulty in carrying on a conversation.

Sussex is a nice county. It was nicer before Mr.

Kipling and Mr. Belloc were rash enough to announce their discovery of it to the world, and it must have been nicer still before the Georgians invented Brighton. It is even now possible for a pedestrian to cross some of its main roads, except during a fine week-end; and, although Chanctonbury Ring is occasionally defiled by the presence of the motor-car, there are some parts of the Downs which the beast cannot climb.

From the philological point of view especially Sussex is almost unique. The South Saxons remained for centuries a race of coast-dwellers, undisturbed by the Norsemen and shut off from the inland country by what was then the great forest of the Weald. This forest was the refuge of those few natives who survived the massacres which followed on the landing of Ælle and his three sons. Celtic elements in the dialect and place-name material of Sussex are almost non-existent. The early date of the conquest accounts for the archaic and characteristic vocabulary which is revealed by the study of the county place-names. *Boship Farm*, near Hellingly, preserves *geburscipe*, peasant community; in *Bulverhythe*, Hastings, we have *burhware*, citizen community; *Morgay Farm*, Ewhurst, is *morgengifu*, the present made to the wife by the husband on the morrow of the wedding-day. Sussex alone is divided into *rapes*, a term supposed to have arisen from the rope and stake enclosure in which the gatherings of each division were held.

It was towards the end of the 5th century that the pirate Ælle proceeded to annex this part of

England, and it is gratifying to find that our authors are inclined to accord historical reality to Cissa, third son of Ælle and founder of *Chichester* (Cissan ceaster), a city which is unique in still possessing a 'pallant', the area in which the Archbishop of Canterbury exercised 'palatine' rights. This same Cissa is probably commemorated in *Cissbury*, only recently saved from a threatened bunglovian raid.

But Sussex is remarkable for the large number of place-names which spring from a clan rather than from an individual. The *ham* and the *ton*, which prevail in the greater part of England, here give way to forms in Anglo-Saxon *ingas*. Thus *Hastings* is the dwelling of the Hæstingas. This kind of formation belongs to the oldest stratum of English place-names, and names like *Angmering*, i.e. Angenmær's people, and *Beeding*, i.e. Beada's people, must represent much earlier settlements than *Alfriston*, i.e. Aelfric's 'town'.

Moreover, the personal names associated with the oldest Sussex settlements are of an archaic type and include many, such as Angenmær, of which there is no other record. Other characteristic South Saxon personal names, unknown elsewhere, are Cycci, whence the deceptive *Kitchenham*, and the Rota of *Rottingdean*.

The Oxford Dictionary is now, as we all know, complete. If, in a hundred years' time, it is rewritten, it will have to register a considerable addition to what has hitherto been known of the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary. The study of place-names reveals the existence of numerous words which never

got into the limited amount of Anglo-Saxon literature which has come down to us and on which our dictionary records are based. Especially is this the case in Sussex and the neighbouring Kent, Hampshire and Isle of Wight, whose topography preserves many linguistic elements which had become archaic or obsolete before the period of the later Teutonic settlements. In the meantime philologists have got to decide what these newly discovered words meant, e.g. what was a *glynd*? This is a fairly common element in Sussex compounds and persists as a simplex in the name of a village near Lewes.

What a comfortable antiquity there is about our English farm-names! There are some Sussex farms still called as they were in the 9th century. There are hundreds which bear the names of 13th-century yeomen. Often they are strangely corrupted. It is not easy to recognize in *Gownfold Farm* the name of its medieval owner, de Gundeville, or to connect *Slaughter Bridge* with the sloe-tree from which it took its name. We no longer call a plank a *theal*, but at *Theal Farm* there is, and was as long ago as the year 1300, a foot-bridge over the Arun. And the *Arun* has no right to its name. It was once the Tarrant, but the name *Arundel*, originally Harehundel, i.e. the dell in which the horehound grows plentifully, has given rise to one of those 'back-formations' of which the classical example is *Cam*, for a river properly called Granta.

This is an example of popular instinct, but occasionally the man of learning has interfered with the map. It was Michael Drayton who first, in

his Polyolbion, misnamed the *Adur*, a river formerly known as the Bramber or the Shoreham Water. It was Lambarde, the antiquary, who restored the obsolete form of the word *weald*, which by Shakespeare's time had normally become *wild*.

While the place-names of Sussex represent the very oldest recorded stratum of Anglo-Saxon, those of Devon are of younger character than any county yet discussed. This is due to the comparatively late settlement, for there was still a British kingdom in Western Devon in the 8th century, so that many of the county place-names are of no earlier date than the 11th century, while some are actually of medieval creation. The linguistic conquest was, however, complete, and Celtic names are rare. Some of them appear in hybrids, e.g. *Countisbury*, of which the first element is probably British for a hill, others in pleonastic reduplications, e.g. *Rosedown*, from Cornish *ros*, moorland. Noticeable also is the almost complete absence of names in *Wal-*, from *wealh*, 'stranger, serf, Briton'.

The Vikings seem to have left Devon severely alone, the only trace of their presence being *Lundy*, from *lundi*, puffin, and *ey*, island. The almost complete absence of *-hurst*, so common in Sussex, points to its being an archaic word. Devonian replaces it by *-bere*, *-bear*, from Anglo-Saxon *bearu*, wood, as in the odd-looking *Cherubear*, of which the first element may be Anglo-Saxon *cyrice*, church, or British *cruc*, hill. Particularly common are *-combe*, *-cott*, *-leigh* (*-ley*, *-ly*) and *-worthy*, all used to form

new compounds in 1086 and even later. Jack *Brimblecombe's* ancestors came from a 'brambly combe' in South Molton Hundred and Amyas *Legh's* from some one of the very numerous places in the county simply called *Leigh*, *Lee* or *Ley*.¹ The ancestors of Betty *Muxworthy*, serving-maid to the Ridd family, probably came from a 'well-manured homestead'. In *Goodcott*, as in *Goodwood*, Sussex, is hidden the familiar *Godiva* (AS. *Godgiefu*, gift of God).

Several of the above examples show how widely a modern form may differ from the original. Still odder are the changes when popular etymology exercises its fancy. *Holy Street House* (Chagford) is from *holh*, hollow, and *steort*,² tail, long narrow piece of land, whence also the pleonastic *Start Point*, formerly the Start. The Irish of *Field Irish* is probably Anglo-Saxon *ersc*, stubble, still in dialect use as *errish* or *eddish*. *Rose Ash* was the ash of the family of Radulf or Ralph, which held the manor in the 12th century. In *Clyst William* is hidden Anglo-Saxon *æwielm*, spring or source (of the river Clyst). There is even a group of fields near Tavistock known as the *Azores*, apparently occupying what was once Hæfer's worth(y). Characteristic of the county are the tendency to preserve, or even insert wrongly, the old inflexional syllable in such names as *Easterbrook*, *Westacombe*, etc., and

¹ Salvation *Yeo's* name may have been derived from one of the many streams so named. It is the Devonshire form of Anglo-Saxon *ea*, water.

² Cf. Dutch *ploegstaart*, plough-tail, the name of a famous Flanders wood, Anglicè *Plug Street*.

the survival in a sadly worn-down form of old prepositions, as in *Neadon*, beneath the down, *Indio*¹ (a farm in Bovey Tracey), beyond the water, and *Henwood*, beyond the wood. What modern spelling can do in the way of disguising a name is seen in *Coppa Dolla*, for 'copped (i.e. pollarded) alder'.

The feudal names of the west country are many and musical. In Devon we find, among others, Berry Pomeroy, Cheriton Fitzpaine, Churston Ferrers, Heanton Punchardon, Sampford Courtenay, Stoke Damarel, etc. A curious example is *Columbjohn*, a manor held in 1234 by Johannes de Culm, who took his name from the river Culm, an old British name latinized by Camden into Columbus. Puck is not so much in evidence as in Sussex, with its *Pook Hill*, *Puckscroft*, etc., but we have one *Puckland*, while Anglo-Saxon *sceoca*, goblin, appears in *Shobrooke*. A gloomy wood of stunted oaks by the Dart is called *Wistman's Wood*, the name being locally thought to refer to the Devil, from dialect *wisht*, uncanny; but, no doubt owing to the late settlement of the region, heathen names are practically absent from the county.

In Northamptonshire, on the contrary, heathen burial-grounds are numerous and point to an Anglian settlement in the 6th century, or perhaps earlier. This is confirmed by the archaic character of some of the place-names, e.g. *Fotheringay* is the island of the people of Fordhere, an Anglo-Saxon name not

¹ For *yo*, *yeo*, stream, see p. 205, n.1.

found later than the 8th century ; *Naseby*, in which the Danish *-by* has been substituted for an older *-bury*, belonged to one Hnæf, a name hardly recorded except in heroic poetry, and *Barnwell All Saints*, in the Nene valley, probably contains the archaic *beorn*, warrior, which may still have been in everyday use at the time of the settlement. Heathen worship is certified by *Harrowden* and *Weedon*, both originally ending in *-dun*, hill. In the first we have Anglo-Saxon *hearg*, heathen temple, whence also *Harrow on the Hill*, in the second Anglo-Saxon *weoh*, idol (cf. p. 210). Earlier still are traces of Romano-British settlements. *Floore*, near Daventry, is probably, like *Flower Farm* (Godstone, Surrey), from one of those tessellated pavements in which the Romans delighted. *Caistor*, near Peterborough, is simply the Latin *castrum*, fort. In Anglo-Saxon times this was Cyneburge cæstre, from a daughter of Penda, king of Mercia, who is said to have founded a monastery here in the 7th century. The preservation of this saintly princess's name in the local *Lady Conyburrow's Way* must almost mark the high level of achievement in folk-etymology ! Celtic names are almost limited to the rivers and the only *Wal-* name, from Anglo-Saxon *weala*, foreigners, slaves, 'Welshmen', is *Walcot*.

The Norse influence is fairly strong, the medieval county representing what was, in the 9th century, a Danish earldom, though the mass of the population remained English. Scandinavian personal names are common and we even find a 'viking's thorp',

now *Wigsthorpe*. *Holdenby* is the *by*, or dwelling, of Halfdan, 'half-Dane', a common Viking name. The local pronunciation appears in *Holmby House*, where Charles I was a prisoner in 1646. The Scandinavian *thing* (cf. p. 192) is represented by *Finedon*, earlier *-den*, the substitution being the converse of that exemplified by *Harrowden* (p. 207), while the Anglo-Saxon *Spelhoe*, hill of speech, was probably the site of a moot.

Among hundreds of curious perversions we may note *Hollow Wood*, near the picturesque village of Harringworth, in which *hollow* is for *healh*, nook, otherwise rare in the county¹; *Turtle Bridge*, from the old Norse name *Thurketill*, cauldron of Thor, whence also the surnames *Thirkettle*, *Thurkettle*, *Thirkle*, *Thurkle*, *Thurtell*, etc., so common in East Anglia; *Badsaddle Lodge* (Orlingbury), originally the hazel or hazel-clump of one Betti. *Thrift Barn*, in Wappenham, is an example, repeated all over England, of an excusable revulsion from the formidable Anglo-Saxon *fyrhthe*, frith, enclosure. The tenacity of local names is illustrated by *Kennulph's Drain*, Newborough, due to Kenulf, abbot of Peterborough in 1005. Among feudal names one notes *Yardley Gobion*, from a 13th-century Henry Gubyun. This lordly Norman name is the origin of the rather homely Gubbins, a field called *Gubbins Hill* preserving the popular pronunciation (cf. p. 195). One would not at first sight associate *Raunds* with the South African *Rand*, but they are ultimately iden-

¹ It has usually survived here in the nominative, while in most regions we find the dative *hale*.

tical, the Northants town having probably been named from its position on the 'edge' of the county.

Opening at random the Surrey volume, we find (p. 212) the hamlet of *Bowler's Green*, immediately followed by a wood known as *Chocolates*. These two names, with their obvious explanations, would delight those well-meaning amateurs who are fond of communicating their etymological discoveries to the 'papers'. Going back, however, a little further, we find that *Bowler* was originally *bove-lith*, i.e. above the slope, while *Chocolates* was Cherteles, from Anglo-Saxon *ceart*, rough moorland, and *læs*, pasture. *Ceart* is particularly common in heathy Surrey, and suggests at once the chosen abode of our Welsh Cincinnatus, whose *Churt* was *Ceart* before King Alfred ascended the throne.

Other strange corruptions noted at random are *Mogador*, which, in spite of its apparent connection with Morocco, was originally the *haw*, or enclosure, of a man named Magot; *Graciouspond*, for Cratchet's pond; *Mincing Lane*, which, like its better-known London namesake, is derived from *menechen*—i.e. nuns; and three *Elmbridges*, in which the *elm* is (1) for Emele, the original name of the river Mole (a later back-formation from Molesey); (2) for *thel*,¹ a plank, Thelbridge becoming th'Elbridge, etc.; (3) for *yeldene*—i.e. the guildsmen. One could go on indefinitely pulling out such plums, embedded in almost every page of the book. A curious contrast to these rustic perversions is offered

¹ Cf. p. 203.

by the modern forms of some well-known Surrey place-names to be found in the old Brixton Hundred. *Bermondsey*, the island or marshy land of Beormund, became, by regular phonetic development, Barmsey, the usual form in the fifteenth century. *Rotherhithe*, the *hyth* (wharf) where *rother* (cattle) were embarked, was Redriff to Pepys and to sailor-men up to the 18th century. Both names have now been restored to something like their original spelling and sound.

Surrey does not seem ever to have constituted a political entity. At various times it came under the sway of Kent, Wessex and Mercia. From Sussex it was completely cut off by the impenetrable Weald. The evidence of the survey shows that it was partially settled by the Saxons in pre-Christian times, for there is a whole pocket of heathen place-names in the south-west of the county, containing such elements as *hearg*,¹ heathen temple, in *Peper Harrow*, *thunor*, the thunder-god, in *Thursley*, *Tiw*, the god commemorated in Tuesday, in *Tuesley*, *weoh*, idol, in *Willey*—‘It is doubtful whether any area of equal extent elsewhere in England includes so many place-names of heathen character’ (Intro.). The name of the county must have been originally *Suthrege*, region of the southerners, a name perhaps conferred by the Middle Saxons on the other side of the river. This otherwise unrecorded *ge*, cognate with the German *gau* of Rheingau, Breisgau, etc., is one more important addition made by the Place-Name Society to what

¹ Cf. p. 207.

we know of the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary. Related to Surrey is *Southwark*, now suggesting the south work (fort), but earlier the Suthringageweorc, fort of the men of Surrey. An ancient Roman road, the Stane Street, traversed the county north and south, and a few *gold-hords*, places of buried treasure, one of them now corrupted to *Goldsworth*, lie near the old Roman ways. Traces of the original Britons survive in such place-names as Walton, Walworth, Wallington (see p. 207), and a genuine Ancient British name is *Penge*, curiously shortened from Penchet, earlier Penceat, head of the wood. Scandinavian elements are almost absent, but Norman-French personal names are much more numerous than in any of the counties dealt with so far, and *pray*, meadow, from French *prés*, is curiously common, often occurring in such pleonastic field-names as *Pray Mead*, *Pray Meadow*, *Pray Field*.

As in previous volumes, it is fascinating to note that hundreds of farms still preserve the names of their medieval occupants. Some of them are still more interesting historically, e.g. *Chantersluer*, earlier Chauntersylver, i.e. a piece of land that paid 'silver' for the upkeep of a chantry. Two place-names that represent opposite poles chronologically and imaginatively are *Runnymede*, of which the earlier forms suggest that the 'mead' had been a place of *runing*, or counsel, long before King John met the barons there, and *Anerley*, now described by the Gazetteer as a suburb of London: 'A modern name. It is derived from the Scottish word *anerly*, solitary, lonely, the name given to the first house

built on this part of Penge Common by William Sanderson, a Scotsman. He offered the railway company a part of his property without charge, provided a station should be made and should be named Anerley.'

Three appendices deal with Place-Names formed from Animal-Head names; *Coldharbour*, which occurs about three hundred times in England, its obvious origin often obscured in the past by 'early Victorian guesses';¹ and The Element *Friday* in Place-Names. In connection with the last, explained as due to the gloomy and unlucky associations of Friday, the editors might have mentioned the 16th-century *Friday face*, sullen aspect.

Two more titbits. *Pankhurst*, whence an illustrious surname, takes its name from one 14th-century John Pentecost. *Neckinger Road*, Bermondsey, is for earlier Neckercher, originally applied to an old stream, a loop in which suggested to early fantasy a likeness to the hangman's noose, popularly the 'devil's neckerchief'.

The volumes of the Place-Name Society are fuller in every respect than anything done before by county antiquaries. Especially do they pay great attention to the minor features of the countryside, such as hills, quarries, copses, farm-houses and fields, the names of which are often as ancient and

¹ e.g. Fr. *col d'arbre*, Lat. *colonorum arua*, *colonia arborum*, *coluber* (implying serpent-worship!), Swedish *kol*, fire, thus implying a 'warm place'! This guessing still goes on in spite of all the work of philologists.

as interesting as those of towns and villages. At first these names had, for various reasons,¹ to be summarily treated, though even the first volume (Bucks) contained such a curious 13th-century field-name as *Thertheoxlaydede*!² Succeeding volumes handled the subject more fully, and, from Northamptonshire onward, 'Field and other Minor Names' have been dealt with in elaborate detail. This was made possible by the co-operation of the Northamptonshire Education Committee, through which was obtained the help of about two hundred of the elementary and secondary schools in the county. Many field-names are comparatively modern and date from the Enclosure Acts of the 18th century, which transformed the open country, but others, found in their original form in early charters and other documents, go back to the remotest times, throwing much light on the old topographical vocabulary and exemplifying Anglo-Saxon or Danish personal names otherwise unrecorded, e.g. in Bucks we find evidence for the female name Hundryth in Hundrythetreow, Hundryth's tree, and the Norse name Krakulfr in Craculfesberch.

In connection with field-names it should be noted that *field* itself is not found preceded by an owner's name till the late Middle Ages. It meant open or common land, just as *lea* (*-leigh*, *-ley*, etc.)

¹ 'An exhaustive survey of the field-names of even a single county would be a task of many years' (Introduction to Northamptonshire Place-Names, p. xx).

² A long narrow passage within a stone's throw of the house in which I am writing was, until recent years, Dead Donkey Lane.

meant open country (originally woodland). The usual names for enclosed patches are *croft*, *acre*, not usually as a measure, *land*, a strip of soil, *furlong*, a vague measure (furrow-long) and the commonest term of all in old field-names, *mead*, *meadow*, Anglo-Saxon *pearroc*, whence *park* and *paddock*, *plot*, *piece*, *close*.¹ Less common are *throat*, from shape, *steort*, tail (see p. 205), curiously disguised in *White Starch* and *Long Straight*, *deal* and *dale*, strips of land, Anglo-Saxon *spic*, a new word discovered by the editors and now surviving as *Speeches*, Anglo-French *assart*, or *sart*, clearing, whence *Great Sarch*, *lease*, pasture (AS. *læs*), in *Calf Lears*, *innam*, another discovery, meaning 'intake' and now corrupted into *Inholm*, *Inhams*, *Innings*, etc., while *fyrhthe* (see p. 208) commonly survives as *Thrift* or *Fright*, and *gare-brode*, a broad field tapering to a 'gore' or point, appears as *Garbutts* and the nautical-looking *Garboard*. Other occasional names are *wro*, corner (Old Norse *vra*), now unrecognizable in *The Rows*, *wong*, meadow (Old Norse *vangr*), still in dialect use, and the north-country *thwaite* (see p. 200), which, in the south, has given *Grimble White*, for Grimbold's thwaite. In Surrey especially we find *shot*, Anglo-Saxon *sceat*, corner, so common in Surrey place-names (*Oxshott*, *Bagshot*, etc.). Another name for a corner is *hern*, as in *Saddlebow Hern* and *Three-herned Croft*. I remember, some fifty years ago, coming across *pightle*, paddock, in Lavengro. This word has developed very numerous forms, one of which is the origin of the Yorkshire surname *Pickles*.

Some of such names are complimentary, e.g. *Golden Halfacre*, *Nonsuch*, *Butter Furlong*, *Muckland* (well 'mucked'), *Paradise*, *God's World*, *Everlasting*, but the reverse is more common, e.g. *Beggar Croft*, *Beggar Mead*, *Devil's Meadow*, *Lousy Mead*, *Leathern Acre*, *Leatherland*, *Hangman's Acre*, *Hellpot Riding* (= clearing), *Sourland*, *Poor Pasture*, *Stony Mother*, *Little Gains*, *Pinchpenny*, *Starveall*, *Starve Devil*, *Starve Robin*, *Bare Bones*, *Raw Bones*. *Mean Field* does not belong here, the *mean* being Anglo-Saxon *gemæne*, common, public. † *One thousand Acres*, in Horley, is a sarcastic name for a patch of 1 rood 4 perches! The mowing of *Five Man Mead* was probably a big job compared with that of *Boy Mead*. †The nature of the soil is characterized in the very common *Catsbrain*, a dialect word for heavy soil full of stones, *Hassocks*, from dialect *hassock*, tuft of sedge, whence the primitive form of the church kneeling-cushion, *Featherbed*, *The Squashes*, *Pudding Field*, *Plum Pudding Meadow*, *Sleepy Field*. Many old field-names bear witness to medieval tragedies, e.g. *Manslaughter*, *Dead Man's Land*, *Dead Women's Field*, and a 'dead churl' of the 13th century is commemorated in the modern *Dead Shells*. Naturally the shape is often indicated, e.g. *Shoulder of Mutton* and *Leg of Mutton*,¹ both probably somewhat modern, *Throat Mead*, *Claw Furlong*, *Roundabout*, *Harpscord Field*, *Wrong Land*, where the adjective has its original sense of twisted, *The Ball*, *Calvestails*, *Dogtail*. This may be the explanation

¹ Cf. the Leg of Mutton pond, Hampstead Heath.

of *Smock Close* and *Dial Mead*, the latter common in Surrey, while *Rainbow*, of which there are eighteen in the same county, alludes to a shape necessitating curved furrows. *Perposture Field* contains Anglo-Norman *purpresture*, encroachment. *Crouch Acre* and *Crutch Field* contained or were near crosses, and *Carfax*¹ was near a cross-roads. *Christ-tree Dale* points to a crucifix and *Heathen Acre* to the site of an old temple or burial-ground, but *Domesday Land* is mysterious (? cf. *Everlasting*). Remote or isolated fields are *World's End*, *Botany Bay*, *Isle of Wight*, comparatively modern. Other names have to do with the rental, e.g. *Penny Meadow* and probably *Paternoster Field*, held by the repetition of a pater-noster at fixed dates. This is not the explanation of *Three-Farthing Deal*, which contains an old name for a fourth part (of an acre). Some patches were held on condition of furnishing certain supplies to the church: such are the very common *Bellropes*, *Lamp Close*, *Torch Plot* and *Holy Bread Field*. *Lammas Close*, *Lammas Mead* were fields under individual cultivation, which, after Lammas, i.e. loaf mass (Aug. 1), became common pasture.

As already sufficiently shown, names of this kind are not always what they seem. Here are a few more examples: *Balance* and *The Bollands* are among the very numerous corruptions of 'bean-lands', the *Bitterns* is for Bittoms, Anglo-Saxon

¹ For the history of this word, once in common use, see my *More Words Ancient and Modern*. There it is stated that the word (plural of Fr. *carrefour*) only survives at Oxford, Exeter and Horsham, but the late J. S. Fletcher, the novelist, informed me that there was a *carfax* in his native village in Yorkshire.

bytme, bottom, *Gascoynes* from Anglo-Saxon *gærs-tun*, grass-enclosure, *Hatchett* from Anglo-Saxon *hæc-geat*, hatch-gate, *Long Chisel* from Anglo-Saxon *ceosol*, gravel, whence *Chesil Beach* in Dorset. *Marrowbone Acre* in Mitcham once contained barns belonging to the Priory of St. Mary Overy, Southwark, referred to (temp. Henry VII) as Seyntemarie-bernes, *Greenwich Mead* is for 'green withes', *Outrage Close* for Outreds,¹ i.e. clearings, *Sharpers Mead* is a corruption of 'sheer (i.e. clear) pool', *Manships* is Anglo-Saxon *gemænscepe*, community, and *Mare Meads* is Anglo-Saxon *gemære*, boundary. In *Apse Meadow* we have a variant of the tree-name *asp*, now incorrectly called an *aspen*,² *Carrying Croft* was once Carrion Croft, and *Loss Field* is from Anglo-Saxon *hlose*, pig-sty.

Among the field-names of Surrey we find the following group—*Child's Pightle*, *Child's Wong*, *Childer Mead* and *Children Land*. The frequent occurrence of the word *child* in place-names is at present unexplained. Professor Mawer writes (Chief Elements used in English Place-Names, p. 16) on Anglo-Saxon *cild*, 'This word, the ancestor of *child*, enters into a good many place-names as the first element. Found as a rule in the genitive plural form *cilda* or *cildra*, as in *cilda stan*, *cylda tun* and *Childerley* (Camb.). It is found in most of the *Chiltons* and *Chilcotes* and in *Child Hanley* (Staffs.). Its exact

¹ From an Anglo-Saxon *ried* or *ryd*, corresponding to South German *ried*, cleared land, and cognate with Anglo-Saxon *rod*, whence north-country *-royd*.

² Due to the frequent occurrence of the adjective in *aspen-leaf*; cf. *linden* for *lind*.

sense is uncertain. The singular is used as a title of honour in late OE. [i.e. AS.] times and this is found also throughout the Middle Ages, as in "Childe Roland". Of the social status of the "children" who gave their names to certain places we know nothing definite. They were not children in the modern sense of the term.'

I am inclined to think that some of these names may, however, be connected with the sense 'all children at school, especially those at charity schools', which the Oxford Dictionary records from c. 1200, and perhaps especially orphan children. This might be one explanation of the surname Child(e), which would thus correspond to the well-established French name Lorphelin. I am led to this conjecture by the existence of the surnames *Childerhouse* (*Childress*, *Childers*), which suggests an unrecorded (dictionary) word¹ for orphanage or school, and *Children*, which in medieval Rolls is 'atte children'; cf. the name *Auxenfants*,² not unfamiliar in modern France. The correspondence of the French and English names seems rather to confirm the meaning I have conjecturally assigned to *child* and to me it suggests that some of the *Childer Meads*, etc., may have been land held in trust for orphans or minors.

¹ That it existed in the 13th century is proved by John de la chyldrehus and Nicholas del chyldrehus (Charter Rolls), Hemery de childerhus (Close Rolls). In the same century we have John attechildren (Patent Rolls).

² A Parisian tax-roll of the 13th century includes the names of Pierre aux enfanz and Richard de chiez les anfanz.

P.S. Professor Mawer, who has been kind enough to look through this chapter, writes: 'You may well be right in your conjecture about alternative interpretations of the word *Child* in place-names. That it was sometimes used in the sense of young person, infant, is shown by Ashby Puerorum in Lincolnshire, which doubtless, if translated into English, would have been called Child's or Children's Ashby, for it takes its name from the choir-boys of Lincoln.'

This interesting parallel suggests the possibility that some of the Childer Meads, etc., may have been endowments for the support of choir schools; cf. the names associated with church upkeep on p. 216.

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